Literary Voice

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Editors:
Dr. Sumedha Bhandari **Dr. Tanu Gupta**

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RESEARCH PAPERS

LGBT/QUEER STUDIES

WOMEN IN INDIAN MYTHOLOGY

MARGINALIZATION AND DISCRIMINATION

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

GENDER AND FILMS

SEXUALITY AND POLITICS

GENDER IDENTITY

Editorial

It gives us immense pleasure to present this 'Special Edition' of *Literary Voice: A Peer Reviewed Journal of English Studies* (ISSN 2277-4521), a compilation of select research articles on 'Feminism and Gender Studies' that were presented at the second National Conference on 'Contemporary Perspectives in English Language, Literature and Cultural Studies,' organized by Chandigarh University, Punjab from 15th -16th July, 2022. The conference was organized in collaboration with *Literary Voice* hosted around 400 delegates, dignitaries and academicians from almost all the states of the country. Ninety-eight papers were presented in the category of 'Women and Gender Studies' which were evaluated and reviewed by eminent professors and academicians from the University of Allahabad, Allahabad, Indian Institute of Technology, Patna, Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee, Jai Narayan Vyas University, Jodhpur, Palamuru University, Telangana, University of Delhi, Delhi, Shiksha O Anusandhan University, Odisha, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, and O.P Jindal University, Sonepat. A point-by-point review was shared with the authors after a double-blind peer review process for compliance. Eventually, thirty-five papers were selected for this issue after a rigorous review process to uphold the academic standard of the journal.

The special edition on *Feminism and Gender Studies* focuses on the various understandings of feminism as a literary theory that proposes frequent interventions and alternative epistemological positions meant to change the social order. The three waves of the feminist movements have been focused on reassessing the archetypes of women and re-questioning the formation of human construct as enacted by a vast repetition of social performance. The third wave of Feminism opened new interpretations of the movement by engaging in interdisciplinary associations. The present day feminism explores the intersections of liberal feminism, cultural/radical feminism, black feminism/womanism, materialist/neo-Marxist feminism, gender studies etc. The future inferences of feminism are pushing the boundaries of gender studies to uncover the unconscious symbolism women have used to describe themselves, their world, and the changing paradigms of society across time and nationalities to uncover the undercurrent of feminism in literature. It is an attempt to incorporate the insights of contemporary feminist and gender discourses as represented in literature and media. The present collection includes a variety of topics that deal with feminism and gender studies from the myriad of perspectives applied by academicians and scholars from all over the country. Covering topics such as gender performativity, homophobia, patriarchy, sexuality, the LGBTQ community, and empowerment strategies, this collection is ideal for researchers, scholars, academicians, practitioners, instructors and students.

The first section, *LGBT/Queer Studies*, deals with sexual ambiguity and queerness, same-sex desires and homophobia in the works of R. Raj Rao, Aravind Adiga, Dhrubo Jyoti and many more. This queer undertone is also analysed in the movies like *The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh* and *Frozen.* The second section, *Women in Indian Mythology*, evaluates the representation of women in *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. The third section, *Marginalization and Discrimination*, focuses on Dalit women, their predicaments and Dalit consciousness. Section four, *Gender-Based Violence*, analyses the turmoil of Afghan women,

victims of acid attacks, 'Korean Comfort Women,' the aesthetics of rape and sexual violence in Therese Park's *A Gift of the Emperor*, Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Feroze Rather's *The Night of Broken Glass* and Shahnaz Bashir's *Half Mother*. Section five, *Gender and Films*, deals with the concept of marriage, masculinity, stalking, new women, homosociality and silence in Bollywood movies. The sixth section, *Sexuality and Politics*, examines Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand*, Harold Pinter's *The Room,* Manto's "Khol Do," Smita Bharti's play *Ghat Ghat Mein Panchi Bolta Hai*, Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*, Perumal Murugan's *Trilogy* and many other works with varied feminist perspectives ranging from sexual politics to performativity. The last section, *Gender Identity*, deals with ageing in women, food and women, phallocentrism, search for self-fulfillment, patriarchy and motherhood. An article on ecofeminism has also been included in this section.

The Special Edition is a kaleidoscope of varied feminist perspectives that attempt to answer the call of gender studies. Since the field of feminism has now opened its wings to include interdisciplinary interactions, this volume will arouse interest among teachers/students of literature and the feminist enthusiasts who wish to explore the horizons of discourse analysis to understand better multiple dimensions of human predicaments.

Dr. Sumedha Bhandari
Assistant Professor
College of Basic Sciences and Humanities
Punjab Agricultural University

Dr. Tanu Gupta
Professor and Head
Department of English
Chandigarh University

Re-Queering the 'Queer': Intersections of Sexuality, Class and Caste in R. Raj Rao's *The Boyfriend* and Dhrubo Jyoti's "A Letter to My Lover(s)"

Suraj Kumar
Junior Research Fellow
Department of English and Cultural Studies
Panjab University
Chandigarh, India
shinysuraj30@gmail.com

Abstract

The present paper seeks to examine the intersections of sexuality, class and caste through a study of the lives of working-class Dalit gay men, as represented in the selected texts. The life experiences of these men reveal that the term 'queer', which was initially championed as an all-inclusive umbrella term, has lost its path. Under the aegis of capitalism, consumerism and a global world order, the term 'queer' now recognises only upper-class and/or caste, able-bodied gay men who have access to certain avenues and are able to adopt certain lifestyles. Those who do not meet these requirements are relegated to the margins of what itself has been a marginalised space. In such a scenario, where does a working-class Dalit homosexual belong? to the queer movement, or to the Dalit movement? While attempting to answer this question, this paper aims to highlight the unfulfilled promises of the queer movement in India, and thereby argues for the need to re-queer the 'queer' to make it truly all-inclusive.
Keywords: Queer, Gay, Class, Caste, Intersection, Dalit.

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On September 6, 2018, the Supreme Court of India scrapped Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code and decriminalised gay sex. The verdict was celebrated across the nation by the members of the queer community and its allies, as a landmark moment in the long struggle of the community for its rights. By challenging the norm of heterosexuality and bringing all non-heteronormative identities under its umbrella, the term 'queer' has established a firm place not only in academia but also in public discourse. The queer movement takes under its purview all those identities that are marginalised based on sexuality and gender and locates these within the structures of power that marginalise them through the discursive production of heterosexuality as the norm. Queerness, then, is at once about the assertion of non-normative identities, and the denial of any norm.

Just two years after the legalisation of homosexuality in India, one can hear the "rantings" of the likes of Dhiren Borisa—an activist and queer geographer, who while

foregrounding his Dalit as well as queer identity, complains that "[r]ights sieve through our bodies but do not touch us in the same ways as judgments promise" (91). What Borisa is trying to highlight is the fact that people with different backgrounds experience their queerness in different ways and that the rights conferred by the legal system cannot be exercised by everyone in the same way. Thus, his "rantings" force one to question who is the subject of these much-celebrated and hard-won rights. Dismissing this celebratory affair, he laments that "Dalit Bahujan Adivasi Queers . . . have been historically *denied the respectability* on the backs of which rests this victory . . ." (92)

At a time when many celebrate the right to identify themselves as gay, there are some who feel the need to assert their caste identity as their caste inhibits them from identifying as gay, and still others, who on account of their lower-class status, cannot adopt the gay lifestyle that queerness has now become synonymous with. Their caste and class weigh more heavily on them than their sexuality or gender. As a social institution based on endogamy, caste primarily operates as a heterosexual imperative. While designating a social hierarchy, it also serves to label homosexuals as outcast(e)s.

The present paper seeks to examine the impact of caste and class on one's sexual identity, through a study of their intersection, as seen in R. Raj Rao's *The Boyfriend* and Dhrubo Jyoti's "A Letter to My Lover(s)." By juxtaposing a fictional work with a non-fictional essay, the paper also seeks to validate the fictional representation with a lived experience. A study of the intersection of caste, class and sexuality is imperative not just because they sustain the oppressive institutions of capitalism and heteronormativity, but also in that they are intimately tied to the corporeal bodies that they serve to label. Thus, the interplay of caste, class and sexuality is fundamental to the nature of desire as well as to the nature of bodies that we desire.

Raj Rao's *The Boyfriend* captures possibly both the ends of the spectrum on which gay identities exist in India. On the one end, there is Yudi—a Brahmin journalist, who identifies as a gay man, and on other end lies Milind, a young jobless "Bhangi" boy, whose sexual identity can be best described using the label MSM (Men-who-have-sex-with-Men). The differences between the two protagonists of the novel exist on multiple axes of power namely caste, class and sexuality. The intersection of these identity labels and the resulting privileges and deprivations will be the focus of this paper. In this respect, the crucial question to be addressed is whether sexual identity can bridge the differences created by caste and class.

The second work under consideration, "A Letter to My Lover(s)," is an essay by Dhrubo Jyoti, addressed to his upper-caste, cosmopolitan lover. On his existence as a Dalit and a gay man, Dhrubo writes, "I knew I couldn't be gay and lower caste together" (8). Building on this remark, the present paper seeks to highlight the ways in which different identities are construed as mutually exclusive. It will also demonstrate how inclusion in the so-called "all-inclusive" queer spaces is contingent on the economic as well as the cultural

capital that one possesses.

Thus, it is imperative that queer studies take into account the context in which different identities are lived out. In other words, there is a need to re-queer the 'queer.' The present paper will demonstrate this need and establish that such a re-queering of the 'queer' would entail paying due attention to the socio-economic factors of class and caste that shape the ways in which different people experience their sexuality.

The two protagonists of R. Raj Rao's *The Boyfriend*—the Brahmin journalist, Yudi, and the jobless "Bhangi," Milind, meet for the first time at the Churchgate railway station in Bombay. Yudi and Milind's first-ever sexual encounter is underwritten by Milind's class and caste status. Although Yudi is observing Milind as a potential sex date, he notes that "[t]he odour of sweat from the young working-class body made his head spin, . . . [His] feet were as shapeless as a leper's, . . . The uncut toenails were pallid. There were cracks on the soles . . . Yuk, Yudi burped" (Rao 7).

As repulsive as Milind's body might seem, Yudi still pursues him. In the whole scene of pursuing Milind and its culmination in the sexual act between the two, several identities make their appearance, which shapes the overall experience that the two share. For instance, when Yudi clasps Milind's hand, he realises that Milind's "fingers were thin, bony. There wasn't much flesh around them, and this made clasping them an unpleasant experience" (8). When someone questions Yudi about Milind, Yudi says that he is a servant (11). Yudi's desire for the less privileged Milind is almost always accompanied by an aversion towards his body, which produces an ambivalent dynamic in their relationship. Both carry biases against each other. Yudi is sceptical with regard to revealing the actual location of his mother's flat to Milind, and Milind gives a fake name (Kishore Mahadik) to Yudi. The differences between the two characters exist on multiple planes. Milind aptly remarks that "I belong to the working class, and you to the talking class" (17).

Rao's depiction of the love affair between these two men has utopian undertones. After their brief encounter, Yudi yearns for Milind. Upon their reunion, Milind reveals his true identity as a Dalit and tells Yudi that an affair between them is not viable because of their different backgrounds. As their love affair progresses, the differences of class and caste are sometimes overcome, but at other times, these differences override the common grounds of queerness that they share. Yudi feels a connection with Milind, in the sense that Milind may be a Dalit, but they were both, in fact, social "outcastes" on account of their sexuality. When Milind challenges Yudi to eat his "jootha" (leftover food), Yudi declares that "Homo[sexual]s are no different from Bhangis. Both are Untouchables" (81). Moments like these capture Yudi's deep love for Milind and can be traced throughout the novel. Such instances show that sexuality does subsume other differences. But these moments are ephemeral and such a portrayal is beguiling, as it underplays how differences and hierarchies of caste and class play out in the field of queerness.

As mentioned earlier, Yudi's relationship with Milind is an ambivalent one.

Therefore, the episodes of *pure* and unconditional love can be juxtaposed with Yudi's attempts of grooming Milind and making him appear *more cultured*. When the duo decides to go to a club, Yudi buys new clothes for Milind to make him *presentable* (86). Even when they perform a marriage ceremony, the Brahmin Yudi performs an elaborate "purification rite" (103). The echoes of the postcolonial theorists, Homi K. Bhabha and Robert Young, can be heard here. Bhabha sees the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised as an ambivalent one. This ambivalence is the result of the act of mimicry, wherein the colonised must mimic the coloniser, who is more civilised and cultured. Similarly, Milind must mimic Yudi's way of dressing and conducting himself. Young builds further on Bhabha's idea and asserts that the relationship between the coloniser (Yudi) and the colonised (Milind) is founded on a desire for the Other, which is accompanied by an aversion to the Other. Accordingly, Yudi desires Milind, but Milind's aversive body becomes an object of desire only after undergoing a ritual of grooming. Thus, sexuality fails to act as an overarching bridge that glosses over differences between caste and caste.

In the last two decades, the queer movement has been largely shaped by the forces of globalisation and consumerism, leading to, what Pushpesh Kumar calls, a "cultural turn." This is reflected in the emergence of a particular queer lifestyle with the proliferation of certain "avenues for queer entertainment" such as bars, disc parties, bathhouses, and tourism (Kumar 66). While sexuality is primarily a matter of desire, queerness has acquired the dimensions of a lifestyle, which is dependent on one's access to certain resources and avenues, and the ability to consume certain products and services. In such a scenario, the class becomes a means of affording one's sexuality. Consequently, class differences translate into different versions of being queer.

Queer people from the upper/middle class are able to adopt "queer lifestyles" and lead *respectable lives* in and out of different support groups and gay clubs. But the material reality of lower-class queer people is inconsistent with such a lifestyle. This is quite evident in the different ways in which Yudi and Milind live out their sexuality. Being a Brahmin and a member of the middle class, Yudi fulfils the parameters of an ideal queer subject (i.e., an ideal queer consumer). But as a working-class Dalit, Milind dismisses Yudi's way of life as "crazy ideas" of "you hi-fi guys" (84). He not only succumbs to the heteronormative institution of marriage but also takes up sex work upon losing his job, as money, family, and community support are indispensable to him. He cannot afford to privilege his sexuality over other pressing needs. Thus, he continues to have sex with Yudi in exchange for money, even after getting married, because he must navigate his non-normative sexuality within the limited space offered by his social location as a working-class Dalit.

Whereas in *The Boyfriend*, there is a clear contrast between two characters coming from different backgrounds—with the privileged Yudi being the one with the agency, in Dhurbo Jyoti's "A Letter to My Lover(s)," one finds a young Dalit boy trying to exercise agency on his own. Coming from a rural background, Dhrubo Jyoti describes his experience

as a Dalit gay man in Delhi. The essay is an exposition of his attempts at hiding his caste to assimilate into the elitist groups on his university campus. Recounting the prerequisites for being queer, he writes "I knew I couldn't be gay and lower caste together . . . [so] I quietly learnt the tricks of your world, I learnt to speak in that way you people called cultured . . . clipped accent and refined pronunciation. . . ." (9). He goes on to write, "I had to keep up with a storm of culture that had missed me so far: pop and rock music . . . theories and films that seemed to have been directed to sieve the ungenteel out of groups" (13).

Struggling to climb the ladder of social mobility, he works hard to accumulate cultural and social capital. Capital, according to Bourdieu, is the foundation of social life; it is what makes "changing one's social status" possible (241). He describes cultural capital as the qualities, skills, and knowledge that one possesses. Accumulation of cultural capital enables social mobility, which is why Dhrubo Jyoti takes great pains to erase his identity as a Dalit and acquire a new garb. His existence is layered with an inferiority complex, as he writes: "I had been trained to know what good looks are (Brahmin), what good Queerness is (English-speaking), and what attractive background is (urban rich)" (Jyoti 10). The experience of his sexuality is informed by a lack of these much-desired qualities, and therefore he goes out to acquire as many of them as possible. This is precisely where he differs from Milind.

While Dhrubo Jyoti exercises agency on his own by acquiring cultural capital and becoming a subject of desire, Milind is devoid of any agency and is a mere object of desire, on which Yudi exercises his agency. Despite this difference in agency, the similarities in their experiences are quite pronounced. Just as Milind uses a fake name, Dhrubo also navigates his sexuality using a fake profile on the internet. Their corporeal bodies as markers of their marginalised existence are mirror images of each other. Much like Milind's dirty feet, there is a mention of the narrator's "hideous" feet with "callused skin" (Jyoti 7). Contrasting his body—"flesh hung loose on a morose soul"—with that of his lover, he describes how caste marks the bodies that it serves to label: "We didn't have the 'body' of a Jat, the 'swagger' of a Rajput or the 'intellect' of a Brahmin. Our bodies were 'smelly' and our habits 'dirty'" (18, 20).

For both Dhrubo and Milind, caste and class weigh more heavily than sexuality. It is not possible to erase their caste and class, or bury their sexuality. These identities must be negotiated tactfully. Their intersection leads to marginalisation at multiple levels and doesn't allow for a smooth and easy passage into the all-inclusive (but elitist) queer spaces. Milind and Dhrubo's experiences show that the so-called inclusive queer spaces are not open to all. The heteronormative institution of caste offers no refuge to non-normative sexualities. Nor are the means of social mobility easily accessible to all.

What this impasse, then, indicates is a major shortcoming of the queer movement. Due to an excessive emphasis on gender and sexuality as discursive constructs, and the consequent disregard of other identity markers, the queer movement ends up disregarding some of its own, albeit less privileged, members. What has led the queer movement to this sad point? Yvette Taylor observes that consumerism has invaded the realm of queerness, resulting

in a commodification of queer identities, which goes hand in hand with the "unhinging [of] sexuality from the social structures that organise it" (200). The implications of such commodification of queer identities are two-fold. Firstly, it leads to the depoliticization of queer people by providing a spurious sense of freedom in the form of queer niche markets, while the hegemonic structures remain intact. Secondly, it makes "social recognition . . . dependent on the ability to consume" (201). This claim is further supported by Shraddha Chatterjee, in her work *Queer Politics in India*. She asserts that the queer movement's complicity with the forces of globalisation, capitalism and consumerism serves to effectively efface those subjectivities that belong to lower classes and lower castes, are uneducated and not in a position to be consumers (94). It is clear, then, that the promise of the 'queer' being an all-inclusive space remains unfulfilled. Hence there is a need of re-queering the 'queer.'

It can be argued without any contention that the issues and concerns of the queer community have now entered the popular imagination. The apparent success of the queer movement gives the impression of a neat teleological progression toward the empowerment of sexually marginalised subjects, but a critical look reveals another picture. As exhibited by the present study, the term 'queer' has lost its radical potential and is open only to those who have the requisite economic, cultural and social capital. Being queer has been reduced to a mere celebration of a 'different' lifestyle, which is being assimilated into the dominant capitalist and consumerist economy.

As back as in the early 1990s, queer theorists were aware of the possible ways in which the emergence of queer identities as mainstream cultural forms could turn out to be problematic for their own agenda. In 1991, Teresa de Lauretis underlined the queer theorists' tendency to overlook the differences that actually shape our identities. Acknowledging the "specificity and partiality of our respective histories," she stresses on the need for "critical dialogue" with those who are different from us (xi). In other words, there is a need to build coalitions with other marginalised groups. This would entail a conception of identities not as mutually exclusive but as intersectional, and giving specific attention to the ways in which intersections of identities serve to compound the marginalisation of some people. This is precisely what I mean by re-queering the 'queer.'

In the 2005 issue of the journal *Social Text*, editors David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam and José Esteban Muñoz, raise the important question – "What's Queer about the Queer Studies now?" and assert the demand for "a renewed queer studies ever vigilant to the fact that sexuality is intersectional, not extraneous to other modes of difference, and calibrated to a firm understanding of queer as a political metaphor without a fixed referent" (1). Thus, the re-queering of the term 'queer' demands attention to the contingent and elusive nature of this term, and to the anti- and non-normative nature of the politics that it advocates. Given the poststructuralist foundations of the term 'queer,' the task of re-queering is not an impossible one. In this respect David L. Eng writes that "queerness remains open to a continuing critique of its exclusionary operations*"* and this precisely is "the field's key theoretical and political

promise" (3).

At the heart of this endeavour of re-queering lies the realisation that sexuality, while primarily being a matter of desire, is also a matter of gender, class, caste and everything else that makes up the whole of our identities. This re-queering is a plea for the queer movement to acknowledge and address the socio-economic differences that exist within the members of its community; a plea for the Dalit movement to not stifle those who don't conform to the heteronormative paradigm within which caste operates; a plea for the privileged members of the society to not shun away the less privileged members and instead recognise the common grounds of their struggle. Lastly, this re-queering of the 'queer' is a plea to do away with parochialism of every kind and be truly all-inclusive.

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Conceal, not Feel: Sexual Ambiguity and Queerness in *The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh* and *Frozen*

Komal Yadav
Research Scholar
Department of English
Chandigarh University,
Gharuan, Mohali (Punjab) India
komal.surender@gmail.com

Dr. Nipun Kalia
Associate Professor
Department of English
Chandigarh University
Gharuan, Mohali (Punjab) India
nipun.uila@cumail.in

Abstract

'Conceal, not feel' is advocated by the heterosexual universe and taught to those who fail to identify themselves as fit for defined heterosexual labels. Fear of acceptance, repression and isolation are the barriers which stop certain characters from being expressive about their queerness. Adult themes are presented in a veiled manner in children's media because of some ulterior motives. Sexual ambiguity, unclear names, confusing pronouns, and gender-neutral practices/ behaviour are utilised for that purpose to probably launch a war against heterocentrism. In this paper, The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh *(2011) directed by John Lounsbery and Wolfgang Reitherman and Frozen (2013) directed by Jennifer Lee and Chris Buck will be read and critically analysed through the queer lens. The concepts of media memories and symbolic annihilation will be focused upon while relating presumed adult themes with children's understanding of the same. The paper highlights queer undertones in the chosen movies and also talks about social realism, children's para social relations and anthropomorphism.*
Keywords: Gender, Sexuality, Frozen, Winnie the Pooh, Queer

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Introduction

> Producers and authors employ mature themes as potent tools in cartoon series/anime and publications. Unveiling strong and good role models like gay characters in stories helps youngsters develop a more optimistic view of themselves. Ochman states, "a positive portrayal of media figures who have a degree of similarity with a person might shift the individual's self-concept". (Ochman 711)

Maintaining gender norms and just discussing heterosexuals may seem obvious to some, but

the ramifications of being silent regarding nonnormative identities are far-reaching. Bullying and harassment of people who do not fit into the conventional gender classifications are common even in primary schools, where such students are thought to be LGBT. Young children tend to take their own lives because they can no longer bear the abuse received from their instructors and classmates. An elementary school is dangerous for many children whose families identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (Ryan 34). Like their peers, kids are exposed to heteronormative messages about who is deserving of love, respect, and protection and who is not. Consequently, they learn to defend and change the information they communicate about their own families and relationships (Ryan 34).

Media Role: Identification, Idealization, and Desire

During their early years of socialization, children are exposed to a wide range of media and books. As a result of marketing sexuality in children's media, some children may start thinking about their sexuality at a younger age. Most individuals do not come out as lesbian or queer until they are 20 years old (Herek 20). People in the millennial generation are becoming more open about their feelings of attraction to people of the same sex earlier in life. Media role models are said to influence an individual's personality characteristics and values via identification.

There are two types of identification suggested by Feilitzen and Linne in 1975. *Similarity Identification* is described as identifying parallels or idealizing media figures and living vicariously via their actions. On the other hand, *Wishful Identification* happens when a person aspires to resemble a media character because of the media figure's enticing traits (e.g., fame, beauty, etc.). When it comes to the identity formation of children and teenagers, Matthews observed that pre-schoolers closely connected with and play with their favourite fictional characters from television and movies. When it comes to their social behaviour, young children look up to their peers on television and in movies as role models. *Sexual identity* or *gender identity* may also be seen in this light. According to Matthews, "the media may also have a good impact on the social lives of children and teenagers." (Matthews 135) On the other hand, the media may have a detrimental effect on children and adolescents by presenting them with bad role models and by exposing them to disturbing imagery. He concluded that media experiences or what may also be referred to as media memories contribute to people's formation of their sense of self and that these experiences stay prominent throughout early adulthood and maybe beyond as well.

Television frequently presents fictitious personalities engaged in work-related activities, and it is one of the numerous critical contributors to occupational knowledge for youngsters. Though there appears to be no research on the impact of televised occupational depictions on economically disadvantaged teens, even though television may be an incredibly essential source of work-related information for this group.

Children's Parasocial Relations

Children's lives are entwined in social interactions with actual people, imaginary pals, or media characters (Calvert 93). According to Piaget, animism develops in early infancy when nonhuman creatures are handled as if they were living, blurring the boundaries between imagination and reality. An opportunity exists to use media characters as early social partners who might influence social interactions that lead to the development of empathy and the understanding that others have emotions and needs. Developing these abilities is essential to a child's early and later friendships, social competence, and cognitive development. When it comes to children's media, parasocial relationships (PSRs) are characterized as one-way, emotionally charged interactions that a viewer has with a media figure that they like (Hoffner328). PSRs for 3- to 4-year-old children are multidimensional, according to research by Bradley J. Bond, Sandra L Calvert and Melissa N. Richards. However, the specific dimensions that comprise young children's PSRs differ somewhat across studies (studies of Bond & Calvert; Hoffner; Richards & Calvert; Rosaen & Dibble). Aside from the fact that the social requirements of children evolve as they become older, this might be mirrored in their PSRs with media characters. Children's connections with media characters can be studied chiefly in terms of how they interact with their favourites.

Social Realism

When it comes to children's media, social realism refers to how they believe their favourite characters may exist in the real world rather than just being made up. According to Rosaen and Dibble, in their experiments with youngsters, the level of social realism is determined by how realistic the character's looks and conduct seem to be compared to the actual world. The characters in children's media, as defined by (Rosaen & Dibble145), are often fanciful, animated beings or creatures who appear in stories in which the seemingly improbable happens like conversing with animals. There is a good chance that even very young children may consider media characters as fictitious creations because of the ease they can distinguish between fiction and reality. However, the methods in which media characters are programmed in television and cinema may encourage young children to see them as more genuine or real rather than fictitious creations based on mere imagination. A great feeling of realism may be conveyed in children's media characters via their movement and interaction, for example, nonhuman media characters are capable of speaking, walking on two feet, and displaying human-like facial emotions, among other things. A common feature of many instructional television shows for children is the use of characters who seem to be waiting for children's reactions i.e., a parasocial interaction that creates a simulated conversation between a child and a media character (Lauricella *et al*. 224).

As talked about by Richert et al. in "Media as social partners: The social nature of young children's learning from screen media," for young children, this simulated social contingency may be a valuable tool for helping them grasp social reality. Experience and maturity both have a role in children's comprehension of the social realism of media characters. As children get older, they are exposed to more media, and their ability to

distinguish between fiction and reality grows. Research conducted by Richards and Calvert in 2016 concluded that younger children are more prone to believe in the reality of their favourite fictional characters than older ones. Consequently, as noted by Philip. J. Auter in "Psychometric: TV that talks back: An experimental validation of a parasocial interaction scale," social realism may become less prevalent in children's parasocial relations as they get older and interact with more media characters.

Character Personification and Attachment of Children: Anthropomorphism

PSRs for both children and adults are characterized by a strong sense of connection to media figures. A high-quality friendship may be defined as one in which the kid feels safe and secure in their relationship with another person. These sentiments include trust, nurturance, and emotional stability. When we feel connected to fictional characters in our favourite shows and movies, it is similar to how we feel about the people in our actual lives.

Regarding the severity of PSI, people with anxious-ambivalent attachment styles were more likely than others to experience PSI with media characters. Cole argued that individuals with insecure attachment patterns seek to obtain emotional stability by developing parasocial interaction with media figures (Cole & Leets 497). According to both parent and child PSR measurements, a kid's favourite television figure provides a sense of security, protection, and trust (Rosaen *et al*. 382). For example, Rosaen et al. observed that both maltreated and typically developing youngsters reported enjoying the comfort and features of real-world friendships in identical ways.

Giles has stated that to build connections with media characters that may provide emotional stability; the character should be seen as person-like i.e., the character should be personified. (Giles 293) According to this idea, people who see media characters as person-like may lessen their emotions of doubt and boost their sentiments of attraction and affinity. Because some children's favourite media characters are presented as human beings, they may be personified, like *Dora the Explorer*. On the other hand, many other famous figures are anthropomorphized animals or objects, like *Winnie the Pooh*.

Queerness and Masochism in *Frozen*

Works featuring female characters in Disney animation began in 1937 with 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs'. After that, 11 female characters appeared until 'Rapunzel' in 2010. The female characters started out as obedient, domestic. They revealed their identity through marriage with a prince, and developed into the character of a female warrior who is independent, pioneering, and sometimes saves the country and leads men. However, the ending of Disney animation still does not deviate from institutional and traditional discourse. The female character who met the male protagonist ended up with a kiss and marriage, or it was to show the virtue of sacrifice for men. However, Elsa in 'Frozen' is a character with a subjective identity that is distinct from the masculine, patriarchal, heterosexual dichotomous discourse shown in Disney so far. The gender identity of Elsa's character can be viewed through queer lens, a concept that deconstructs the distinction between sex and gender and

deconstructs the gender concept by performative and typed behaviour, and deconstructs the dichotomous nature of male/female, heterosexual/homosexuality. It can be said that queer performativeness blurs the boundary between lesbian-gay sexuality and heterosexuality, and it can be said that this parody strategy leads to a politicism that resists the dominant discourse. Elsa's performance is at the borderline between sister love and heterosexuality. If analysed from a heterosexual perspective, Elsa's identity should be understood only as the love of a sister, intimacy with her sister. On the other hand, if we focus on the relationship between women, the relationship between Elsa and Anna is perceived from a queer perspective. Viewed from the concept of a lesbian continuum, the queer love of Disney female characters with identity restrictions looks like a bond between women, so sexual desire can be concealed more easily than between heterosexual love. Elsa develops into a performative identity through suppression and expression of queer identity. It can be seen that the magic she possesses is recognized in Arendelle's worldview, from the existence of taboo and fear in the early days to the existence of a lesbian phallus. It is viewed as a meaningful phallus against the privileges in the heterosexual patriarchal system.

Apparently positive depiction of female queerness shows how Frozen's gender differentiation orbits around an eroticized line to femininity favourable to the 'male gaze.' In the post-structuralist context, this movie is a repetition of Freud's fort/da image, imitating the child's game in which the absence of agency in parting from the mother is repeated at the allegorical level. The exposure of the absence of agency is masochistic, depicting discomfort just to better appreciate the delayed pleasure of mother's coming back. When Frozen connects these pleasures to their male gay codings, in visual and narrative terms, it showcases a multifaceted identification of spectatorial pleasure with a masochistic meaning of queerness. The display of Elsa's outing, after she escapes into a wilderness frozen by her frantic magical retort to Anna's efforts to open up the stifled castle to the outside world, is implied in a gender-specific style.

> Elsa transforms, in this scene, from a huddled figure constricted by her socially-conditioned regalia, the full extent of her body (which is partially concealed behind her enveloping arms) outside the frame of a medium shot, to a strutting, sexualized figure, in both senses of the word, her entire body (and particularly the over-exaggerated distinction between waist and hips) revealed through a long shot. She not only magically changes her clothing and hairstyle, but awakens her sexual nature along with her homosexuality. (Geal 100)

This transformation can be indicative of a positive approach to queerness (or female queerness) for its spectators. The film breaks the narrative binary, of the male being active and female counterpart being passive, but also strengthens the traditional visual binary of the cinema.

Queer Overtones in *Winnie the Pooh*

Through the personification of stuffed animals in *Winnie the Pooh*, sexual ambiguity is used to demonstrate that one's sexuality is not one's identity, providing a healthy message to children that combats heterocentrism. The characters deconstruct the gender roles and have

ambiguous names and use ambiguous pronouns. The main character, Pooh is represented as somewhat 'asexual' and remains without clothes mostly in the books. However, in the movie it is shown wearing a bright red vest which is too small for him. Red colour is provenly thought to suggest passion and sexuality which are in turn thought of in relation to females (Yadav and Kalia 93). This colour symbolism has been talked about in a book: "The Meaning of Colors" by Herman Cerrato as well (Cerrato 4). It is representative of sexual passion and sexuality. Clothing provides several of the visual cues for gender. While it is likely to consider the work on fashion, dress, and gender as a subdivision of dress studies, it is imperative to recognize that it is just as much a subdivision of gender studies. Even before the advent of the modern notion of gender, dress scholars in anthropology, psychology, sociology, and art history highlighted the differences between male and female adornment and associated them to the cultural and social roles of men and women. Conclusively, Pooh has a contentious and ambiguous sexual identity.

In the movie, some of the traditional ways are dismantled and a space for new possibilities is opened up. This is symbolically done in many ways. Eeyore loses his tail which was understood as an essential component of his being. He struggles with accepting himself the way he is. This is characteristic of the struggle for acceptance and self – realization queer population faces. Also, the fact that everyone looks for alternatives for his tail as a replacement option, the alternatives also suggest the different colours of gender and sexual identity. All of these however stand subject to Eeyore's own acceptance and agreement. Apart from this, we witness incorrectly spelt words i.e., diverting from the usually followed conventions. For example, "Hunny" for Honey, "Gon out" for Gone out, "Bizy" for Busy, "Don't Nock" for Don't Knock, "Pliz Ring" for Please Ring, "Tael" for Tail, etc. All this irrefutably signals towards breaking the conventions.

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Representation of Same-Sex Desire in Aravind Adiga's *Selection Day*

Kavya Nair K. S
Research Scholar
Department of English
School of Humanities & Languages
Central University of Rajasthan, Bandar Sindri
Ajmer (Rajasthan) India
kavyanairks94@gmail.com

Abstract

Aravind Adiga's oeuvre is remarkable for its tangible depiction of the multifaceted issues that inform the social and cultural fabric of contemporary Indian society. Following the Dickensian tradition, Adiga tries to engage with the readers through a critical analysis of the problems such as caste and class permeating the everyday reality of most Indians. In addition to this, he has recently dealt with taboo topics such as gender and sexuality, in an attempt to give voice to the sexually marginalized communities. Belonging to the genre of coming-of-age fiction, Selection Day *(2016) invariably traces the coming-of-age of two adolescents in the backdrop of a game of cricket. Though Adiga manages to bring about the participation and visibility of non-normative adolescents, his work falls into the category that uses homophobic discourse to propel the narrative. The present paper attempts to look at the representation of same-sex desire among adolescents in the coming-of-age genre through a close reading of* Selection Day. *The paper will also examine the position of queer adolescents who go beyond the heterosexual script in the Indian sports fraternity. Furthermore, the paper will also aim to discuss the place of queer coming-of-age narratives in Indian Writings in English.*

Keywords: Same-Sex Desire, Adolescents, Coming-Of-Age, Non-Normativity, Homophobia, Sports

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The Man-Booker prize-winning Indo-Australian author, Aravind Adiga's venture into the world of literature from a journalistic background has given him the accessibility to portray contemporary India in all its multitudes. His keen insight to dwell upon the substratum of Indian reality has enabled him to seek out new territories and to reflect upon the life that later informs the core of the neo-liberal society. Following what Dickens and Balzac have done through their literary productions to better the societies in England and France, Adiga webs out his narratives around the ills and nuances that trouble the middle-class lives by "unravelling the undeniable truths" which are hidden in the social, cultural, and moral fabric of Indian society (Mishra 80). After recounting the fascinating success story about the overnight rise of one character from rags to riches in *The White Tiger*, Adiga extends his critique of the social evils through another captivating and engrossing novel, *Selection Day*.

Published in 2016, *Selection Day* is Adiga's third novel, and it is a cleverly spawned coming-of-age narrative of two siblings—Radha and Manju. The narrative powerfully binds together the "societal phenomenon of class construction, and an unquenchable thirst for money", along with the depiction of unfulfilled desires and preordained destinies (Yadav 154). The author foresees and addresses the theme of homosexuality, which is unheard of in the sports fraternity, so far, by incorporating a game of cricket in the backdrop of the novel. This paper, through a close reading of the *Selection Day*, attempts to trace the coming-of-age of two non-normative adolescents growing up gay in a predominantly heterosexual environment. Further, with the aid of Queer theoretical framework, the analysis will also look at the representation of same-sex desire in coming-of-age narratives in the Indian literary context.

As defined in *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, Queer Theory is a "radical rethinking of the relationship between subjectivity, sexuality and representation" within the textual and societal discourse (Seldon 253). Deriving from Gay and Lesbian theory—which focuses on male and female homosociality respectively—queer theory holds the binary natures of gender and sexuality under erasure to bring forward a multiplicity of identities. It also seeks to disrupt the essentializing tendencies that have been so rampant in literary, social, and scientific domains. In a literary context, the queer theory "focuses on eliminating binary oppositions, whether linguistic or thematic, by either resisting or subverting the presence of gender and sexual stereotypes within a body of text" (Goldsmith 12). Queer coming-of-age novels—those adolescent novels explicating storylines and characters within the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ+) community—serve a vital purpose in normalizing queer culture for readers. These works of fiction are loaded with the responsibility of depicting a positive representation of queer identities to young readers thereby giving alternate sexualities the visibility that they truly deserve. As a genre, coming-of-age novels find little or no space within the Indian literary tradition. In addition to this, queer coming-of-age novels struggle to find their existence since the development of a child or an adolescent is considered unstable as compared to adults within the Indian literary scenario and consequently, one cannot even trace their presence in the dominant narrative frames. Since the 1990s, a few writers have started to come up with themes of homosexuality in their works like Firdaus Kanga, and Abha Dawesar and their narratives have at least initiated the representation of adolescents with same-sex desires as opposed to what was so prevalent in Indian English literature. With the beginning of the twenty-first century, more writers started to advance whatever was already established in this genre, thus providing a greater range of possibilities for diversity and celebration of queer identities.

Aravind Adiga, in an attempt to present queer transgressions, moulded his eponymous characters, Balram and Ashok in a heterosexual environment nourishing ambiguous desires. This ambiguity in itself gives forth innumerable possibilities for desires among people. Following this, Adiga has churned out another story about the growing up of two adolescents in the city of Mumbai, thereby introducing explicitly the presence of homosexual characters and desires even when the concept itself was a criminal offense in India when the work got published. With representation comes the visibility of the

marginalized sections, but how far the representation has yielded the due visibility of adolescents with alternative sexuality is taken into question in this paper. According to developmental psychology, adolescence marks the beginning of identifying one's sexuality and coming-of-age narratives invariably trace the emerging sexuality. In *Selection Day,* the twelve-year-old Manjunath Kumar's second encounter with Javed Ansari sent Manju "the same charge of electricity an ornithologist feels when he catches sight of a rare migratory species of bird" (Adiga 63). What went through Manju at the sight of Javed Ansari is different from what his brother Radha Kumar felt. While Radha and Mohan Kumar imagined a potential rival in Javed Ansari, Manju experienced a sort of chord connecting with the snobby boy and this precludes the budding of a new friendship that is about to develop in the course of the novel.

At the very outset of the novel, Adiga foregrounds the chasm that exists between Manjunath Kumar and Javed Ansari as seen through the eyes of Manju's father. Mohan Kumar sees his sons as opportunities to climb up the social hierarchy by establishing Radha and Manju as the first and second-best batsmen respectively. This explains Mohan Kumar's migration from Ratnagirihalli, a poor taluk in Alur to Dahisar in Mumbai. Again and again, the change in his location to Chedda Nagar sheds light on the chutney seller's deepest aspiration to make his sons famous and launch them into the world of cricket, which in itself is a voucher for him to escape to the higher social strata of society. In Adiga's buoyant and socially penetrating novel, Manju and his brother thus enter "in the filtration system that sucks in strong wrists, quick reflexes and supple limbs from every part of the city, channels them through school teams, club championships, and friendly matches for years and years, and then one sudden morning pours them out into an open field where two or maybe three new players will be picked for the Mumbai Trophy Team" (Adiga 6).

Such was Javed's charm upon Manju that any of Mohan Kumar's preaching did not affect the budding batsman. After passing so many black sewers, and many concrete towers, Manju reached Payyade Sports Club only to find a black Honda City stopping behind him. "One look at him and Manju knew that they had both arrived at the club early for the same reason: to see if the other one would also be there" (Adiga 112). Another instance where Manju's desire to be with Javed can be seen when his thoughts came to a sudden halt when he felt the presence of Javed somewhere around him:

> Then someone whistled-the air filled with perfume-and a boy in a blue cap passed right by him. Farewell at once to both man-made and natural elements. Tucking his textbook under his arm, Manju followed Javed Ansari. (83)

Instead of brushing off the attraction they mutually had, these adolescents try to figure out what was happening with their emotions. This gives out the space to explore desires and helps in gay identity development as put forward by Cass. In the six-stage model of Gay identity development, Cass refers to Identity acceptance as "more and more validating and normalizing contact with other lesbians and gay men, helps people to increasingly accept themselves. While passing as heterosexual becomes a habit by this stage, some selective self-disclosures may occur at this stage. There may also be only limited contact with heterosexuals and this reduces feelings of alienation" (qtd. in Ranade 15).

Though Adiga attempts to churn out a space that is conducive to the growth of non-normative adolescents, he still used homophobic discourse as the primary source for plot and character development, with a majority of the characters referring to homosexuality in negative ways and reinforcing the use of secret coded language regarding sexuality. Wickens claims that "communities often used metaphors or roundabout phrases to discuss themselves," and protect the community from harmful outsiders (Wickens 155). The queer community is not an exception to this concept. This kind of coded language provides the community members the safety they are seeking, but sometimes it inadvertently becomes the double-edged sword that isolates the people it strives to protect. The coded language that is in use will reinforce the need for secrecy of queer identities and they are unable to express themselves openly without the fear of there being repercussions, ultimately silencing their queer experience to the outside world. Javed Ansari, the openly out gay boy's engagement with Manju is almost always in the form of rhetoric, which only Javed understands, and Manju's bewilderment in understanding the same shows his inexperience in the world of homosexuals. The first time after Javed helped Manju to shave off his beard to reveal a shining new face, by "fogging the glass with his breath, and wetting his finger, Javed wrote on it:

Roses r red
Violets r blu
U r a giant
Or u r a tool

'You know what this poem means, or shall I explain?' (Adiga 157).

The author tries to challenge the notions of homophobia by taking up a subject that is considered taboo in the current cultural scenario but leaves the situation intact through the usage of homophobia as the primary catalyst of the novel. This leaves the impression that while disbanding heteronormativity, the portrayal of homophobia is also a necessary component of queer identities in coming-of-age narratives. Works relying on these stereotypical methods are highly problematic as readers are not only presented with the same narrative that trivializes the queer experience as a constant battle between acceptance and rejection but is also shown that most often these battles are fought in vain, as homophobia cannot be conquered. This kind of homophobia is perpetuated in the works by presenting homosexuality as a negative entity. This is evident when twice, Manju attempts to degrade Javed and his sexuality by stating that he is a 'homo'. For Instance:

> Walking around him to the open door, Manju stopped, and just to make absolutely sure that this had all not been a waste, that this would be final, and he would not see his pathetic face again in the morning at the cricket practice, he whispered, as he went past, the word that he and his brother had written three years ago on Javed Ansari's chest-guard. 'You *homo*'. (256)

Repeated usage of this term as a derogatory remark will only add to the existing homophobic discourse. Though the novel attempts to normalize queer identities, they do so by reinforcing the otherness of the community. Rather than deconstruct the framework of heterosexist arguments, the novel harnesses these to drive the plot. After a brief encounter with Javed Ansari, when Manju came back, Mohan Kumar turned the volume of the TV and asked his

son to listen to the news:

> As Manju obeyed his father, the newsreader announced that two more ministers in Madhya Pradesh had stated… increasingly fashionable practice of homosexuality, sanctioned neither by the Indian Penal Code nor by four thousand years of Hindu Civilization, should be curbed at once and that nationwide 'rehabilitation centers' should be established, incorporating a daily regimen of cold showers and group exercises for young deviants, so they could learn the value of physical hygiene and family life. (Adiga 171)

Another instance of using the homophobic discourse is when Javed Ansari, stirring the coca-cola with his right hand, turned the pages of the lawbook until he reached Section 377—Unnatural Offences:

> Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine. (Adiga 243)

Though Javed was getting to know about the establishment of the times he lived, the revolt he felt by "drawing a giant penis over the page, before embellishing it with appropriately sized balls and pubic hair" shows the lack of queer affirmative literature or law to safeguard the emotions that he identified within himself (Adiga 243). As stated by Wickens, "Heteronormative assumptions, including homophobic attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours provide the root for the internal and external conflict for the characters in the majority of LGBTQ-themed books" (153). These allusions are often based on historical allusions to psychiatric deviation and illness. The pathologization of Queer identity reinforces its otherness and this fuels the heterosexist discourse. Homosexuality and all other sexualities are demonized for being abnormal whereas heterosexuality is seen as normal and healthy. Thomas Crisp's "From Romance to Magic Realism: Limits and Possibilities in Gay adolescent Fiction" delineates that the consistent reliance upon homophobic discourse is toxic to the genre itself:

> Within the growing canon of gay young adult literature, authors who rely upon homophobic discourse may hope that their work will educate readers about the "problem" of homophobia, but the recurring reliance upon homophobia as a literary mechanism to engender "realism" in literature simultaneously implies that homophobia is too large an issue to confront and is ultimately bad, but inevitable behaviour. (339)

Thus, it is evident from the placement of the characters that Adiga has used this kind of homophobic discourse to propel his narrative. But from the depiction of characters, he hasn't relied upon the stereotypical construction of secondary characters as queer and the protagonist supporting the coming-of-age/out-of-supporting characters. Adiga dared to portray Manjunath Kumar and Javed Ansari as Queer but the visibility which they receive in the course of the novel is debatable.

While there is increasing emphasis on gay-affirmative literature, there still exist large gaps in understanding the lived experience of persons who transgress norms of gender and sexuality, and whatever is available as literature on affirmative practice is restricted to adults

and there is a dearth of literature that is available to adolescents and young adults to grow up with. Here, Adiga brings his *Selection Day*, with queer affirmative as well as confused characters who are trying to find a space in the surroundings they live. Adding to this, Adiga well-drafted a queer coming-of-age narrative in the backdrop of a game of cricket, to figure out the existence of non-normative individuals in the sports fraternity. The novel in particular talks about Cricket and Srinivasan Ramani, in his article "Cricket, Excesses and Market Mania," has depicted how cricket has a lot to play with the economy of India:

> Cricket in India has become the only sport that has captured widespread mass and media attention. The popularity of the sport has increased in leaps and bounds and the way the sport has been managed and administered has reflected the dominant mode of economic transactions in the country. (Ramani 2008)

In India, Cricket is a billion-dollar business. Every businessman tries to manoeuvre the lucrative opportunities which cricket has bolstered in recent times. For Anand Mehta, Cricket is all about an investment from which he can extract money. Radha and Manju are his investments and through his sponsorship, the siblings are asked to provide him with lifelong returns. Mohan Kumar dedicates his life to his sons so that the boys can secure a place in the domain of cricket. Radha and Manju, following the musings of their father, were not even given a choice to look for other career alternatives. It's only when Radha got ousted from the game, that he got a chance to explore other areas in life. Manju, all the while was stuck in the web which Mohan Kumar laid because of the scholarship he received as part of his cricketing career. Javed Ansari, with his nuanced ability to play and monetary power, chose to not stay back in the field because of the heteronormative system that the fraternity upholds. Javed in a conversation with Manju states that:

> 'No. There is another reason, Captain,' Javed said, 'that I had to leave cricket, and it's the same reason you too will have to leave, sooner or later.'
>
> 'When we were in Uttar Pradesh, my father asked me if I wasn't interested in girls.'…
>
> 'And I said, if I'm not, what is your problem, Daddy?'…
>
> 'Do whatever you want, as long as it doesn't cost me any money.
>
> Man, I love my father sometimes.' (Adiga 194)

Javed clearly states to Manju his reason to leave his illustrious career as it always curbed his freedom to exercise his sexuality. Since he couldn't find an outlet to be free and be himself, he chose to leave the game itself. This was possible only because of the social position he had. Had it been Manju, the struggle to make a living out of Cricket would have crushed his desire to live as a homosexual boy. Still, Javed admonishes Manju that his sexuality would be the same reason that he would be leaving the crease one day. Javed has come out very early in his adolescence possibly because of the presence of a supporting parent. The presence of such members within the family enables queer adolescents to identify and come to terms with their gender identities and sexualities. Javed continues, 'one time the wicket-keeper from the Dadar school asked me, you're a gay or what? Manju, has no one asked you yet?' (Adiga 192). The question left Manju puzzled because even the very thought of identifying as gay in the family background in which he grew up was a near-impossible thing to do let alone accept what he innately feels before the public. Being a queer affirmative person, Javed asks Manju:

> . . . stop being a slave. What's your problem if someone calls you gay?' . . . I know

you're scared of everything . . . But why just look at everything? It's not normal. Do something . . . I'm asking you, what are you scared of? It's all normal, man. Don't let your brain control you. (Adiga 193)

Thus, Adiga has successfully portrayed a homosexual boy, growing up in the city of Mumbai even when section 377 existed, criminalizing any other forms of sexuality that transgresses the heterosexual domain. Since the publication of Adiga's work in 2016, one can witness an increasing amount in the production of queer coming-of-age narratives, thus bridging the gap that existed in Indian Writings in English. Most works of fiction still follow the tradition of homophobic discourse along with challenging the established notions of gender and sexuality. At the time of the publication of the novel, homosexuality in India was a punishable offense. Adiga not only addresses the issue of homosexual culture in society but extends it to the sports community as well. In a country where no sportsperson has come out openly as homosexual, Adiga, by depicting immense challenges, gently confutes the possibility of the same in the foreseeable future.

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Portrayal of Indian Homophobia in the Select Works of R. Raj Rao

Shiksha Bala
Research Scholar
Department of English
Chandigarh University, Gharuan
Mohali (Punjab) India
shiksha671139@gmail.com

Dr. Tanu Gupta
Professor
Department of English
Chandigarh University, Gharuan
Mohali (Punjab) India
tanu.e9349@cumail.in

Abstract

Homophobia is a prejudicial fear and hatred towards homosexuals; it can be physical and psychological persecution of a homosexual person. Rao presents a dichotomous approach to the depiction of Indian homophobia. On one hand, his narratives show that homophobia is prevalent in India. His works depict the physical, mental, and emotional violence against queer people. There is an explicit lack of family support and discrimination from society and the police. On the other hand, Rao in Criminal Love? Queer Theory, Culture, and Politics in India *(2017) claims that real homophobia does not exist in India. Indian homophobia is purely in the "cosmetic sense" rather than its "technical sense" because, on the moral\immoral ground, both homosexuals and heterosexuals are equivalent. Both receive equal hatred when caught cuddling up in public places, unlike in the orthodox Christian West, where homosexuality has been seen as a sin rather than a crime. This research paper will examine Rao's Criminal* Love? Queer Theory, Culture, and Politics in India *(2017),* Hostel Room 131 *(2010), and The* Boyfriend *(2003) as a point of reference to highlight how sexual minorities experience discrimination and how Indian homophobia differs from the West.*

Keywords: Homophobia, Homosexuals, Heterosexual, Discrimination, Queer, Sexual Minority

***

Introduction

Ramachandrapurapu Raj Rao is an Indian writer, poet, and ex-HOD of the Department of English at the University of Savitribai Phule, Pune. He has been a prominent gay-rights activist and openly gay for the last forty years, writing extensively on India's gay life in recent decades. Rao picks up issues, notions, and theories within the domain of queer

studies and examines the everyday experiences of Indian queers. He underlines the sites of transgression within a seemingly heteronormative society and analyzes all the aspects of the struggle of being queer in a particular atmosphere. As a queer writer and theorist, Rao continually destabilizes normativity and deconstructs the idea of 'normal'. His Indian queer texts push the boundaries of heteronormativity. He embarks upon finding a cohesive understanding of alternative sexualities in India's current social and political realities. The first section of the paper examines the portrayal of homophobia in *Hostel Room 131 (2010) and The Boyfriend (2003),* and the section deals with the distinction between homophobia in the West and India

Stigmatize Treatment of Sexual Minority

The Boyfriend (2003) is considered one of the first gay novels, which deals with transgression, alternate spaces, and homophobia in Indian society. The novel narrates the same-sex relationship of a journalist, Yudi, in his forties, and a nineteen-year-old Dalit boy named Milind. Yudi is an upper-class English-speaking journalist living in Mumbai. He often visits the loo of Churchgate station and picks up boys randomly, especially working-class boys, for casual sex. He relishes a promiscuous life and frequently has sexual activity in public locations. The novel explores the unseen and chaotic side of Mumbai's gay subculture. At the beginning of the novel, Rao gives precise details of the public gents' toilets of the city as the sites of homoerotic desires. He describes the Churchgate loo as:

> The Churchgate loo has two sections. By convention one of them is the gay wing, the other the other the straight. The hetero wing of course has a better supply of mainstream men, but one dare not cruise in that area for fear of being bashed up. (6)

Rao further describes the loo as a supplier of men for twenty-four hours and the site of secret homosexual activities in the city. "The gents' toilet at Churchgate provided a twenty-four hour supply of men; the amount of semen that went down the urine bowls was enough to start a sperm bank" (2). It is difficult to imagine such places as a site of homosexual activities for those who have spaces in mainstream society to satisfy their desires. Rao's creation of queer space for his gay subject in the dirty confines of a public toilet reflects the queer political agenda to thrash out a buffer zone for the minoritized sexual subculture. The toilets represent the mainstream's homophobic ideology toward gay subculture. Toilets are the only safe space for sexual minorities in the city:

> The stinking places were always humming with erotic activity. Orgies in the dark, amidst piss and shit. The foul smell, somehow, made sex more enjoyable. Having spent so much of his life in these loos Yudi has come to the conclusion that there was indeed something sexual about filth. (28)

Rao's placing of same-sex activities in such spaces, therefore, parodies "normal" sensibilities of the clean and unclean. Same-sex sexual activities are thereby presented as "unclean". Filthy places, therefore, are used by Rao as a narrative tool to critique societal phobia of the traditionally held views of a clean body and a clean mind. The toilet spaces used act as a harsh critique of society's homophobic ideology, created in a dominant patriarchal society

propagating a heterosexual ideology for social control.

Hostel Room 131(2010) is a love story between two young men, Siddharth and Sudhir, in an engineering college hostel. The narrative is a way to understand the issues facing young gay men in present-day India. Rao makes Sudhir undergo a sex change operation, a physical transformation, and becomes Sumati to live together as a same-sex couple in India. At the end of the novel, they have to fly to America to live as a normal couple. Thus, the novel becomes reflective of homophobic modern India, driven to a sex change operation as the only solution to live in matrimonial bliss. Rao uses a parallel narrative, the love story of Anarkali and Raj Kumar, a Hijra-Koti couple, to further bring out the marginalization of the queer subculture in Indian society. In India, *Hijras* are identified as neither male nor female, and they are referred to as the "third gender". Anarkali was born as a male but undertook her castration rite and became a woman. Rao highlights the condition of the Hijra community through Anarkali, depicting how Hijras beg during the daytime and work as prostitutes at night for their living. Rajkumar is a Kothi. Kothis are feminine men who engage in sex with men in a passive way. They are men but always take a passive role in bed with men. In the novel, Raj Kumar faces an extreme kind of homophobia. He leaves school because his classmates always harass him for his sexual orientation. "Classmates teased him, calling him names. 'Chhakka,' they would viciously say. One or two even molested him on the school grounds. Unable to take it, Raj Kumar had left school" (101). He is living a dual life; despite the fact that he is about to marry Anarkali, he is unable to come out to his family:

> His putative family had no idea he was, at that moment, solemnizing wedding vows with a hijra. They had their own marriage plans for him and were showing his photograph to the parents of girls of their caste. Raj Kumar was doomed to live a schizophrenic life, comprising his parents, wife, children, and job in the plaza by day, and Anarkali, sex work and the company of fellow kotis by night. And neither side would ever become aware of the existence of the other. This was what the total solar eclipse had prophesied for him. (110)

Compulsory heterosexuality is a term that criticizes the very notion of heterosexuality; as the only form of sexuality that exists by exposing its socially constructed nature. It postulates that heterosexuality is commonly represented as a natural, inborn, and freely chosen form of sexuality. Heterosexuality, instead, is the outcome of "compulsory" social arrangements that marginalize and eliminate same-sex relationships while normalizing opposite-sex relationships. Compulsory heterosexuality is a term coined by Adrienne Rich in her influential lesbian feminist essay, *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence* (1980). She points out that compulsory heterosexuality is deeply rooted in our day-to-day lives through social and political institutions. Heterosexuality, according to Rich, is not just a matter of personal choice but rather has to be "maintained by force" (Rich, 1980). In *Hostel Room 131,* Rao makes Sudhir undergo a sex change operation as the only way to live in a country driven by compulsory heterosexuality where two men can't get married, but a man and a woman can. Sudhir states:

> If I'm a man and am caught having sex with another man, people will call me *chhakka* or a homo—both words of abuse . . . But if I am a woman, they'll accept my relationship with a man. Because it's a relationship that society understands. So, in a

way, I'm doing it not just for myself, but also for society. (204)

Compulsory heterosexuality often leads to internalized homophobia. Rao portrays Milind as a victim of internalized homophobia. Right from the beginning of the novel, Milind is not sure about his sexual preferences. He is not as radical in his thoughts and attitude as a gay person like Yudi. He always hesitates to count himself as a member of the gay community. His sexual identity remains heteronormative throughout the novel; he always plays the "active" role in bed and thinks that it does not make him a member of the homosexual community. He does not want to be called a *"chhakka",* a homosexual. After his return from the A. K. Modeling Agency, he blames Yudi for his sexual promiscuity. "You are the one who has ruined my life. It's because of you that I became a homo . . . I would never have landed up at a place like A. K Modeling Agency and become a prostitute. Shame on you" (Boyfriend 210). Milind eventually gets married to a girl of his family's choice and becomes a part of the mainstream heteronormative society. He doesn't want his wife to know the other side of him.

Conversion therapy is a practice used to change the sexual orientation of a homosexual person and convert him to a heterosexual one by using spiritual, physical, and psychological methods. There is no scientific proof that a person's sexual orientation can be changed from homo to heterosexuality. These practices are harmful, and medical institutions warn people against these conversion therapy practices. Although every mainstream medical and mental health organization has condemned these treatments, some practitioners continue to practice conversion therapy due to ongoing discrimination against LGBTQ people. Conversion therapy has been linked to depression, anxiety, drug use, homelessness, and suicide among minors. Sudhir's parents took him to Sri Sri Sant Pitamber Maharaja Baba's ashram for his conversion therapy. Baba claimed to change the gender identity of a homosexual person and fit him into the heterosexual or cisgender category:

> The baba ordered Sudhir to take off his shirt and lie down. A metal plate was placed on his chest. Fixed to the plate was a cream-coloured cord, at the other end of which was a 15-watt three-pin plug. The cold metal sent a shiver down Sudhir's spine. Without warning, the baba put the plug into a socket and switched on the button. A 440-volt current passed through Sudhir's body. (*Hostel Room 131* 145-146)

After this shock treatment, Sudhir was no longer the same. He refused to recognize his friends and Siddharth. He even attacked Siddharth with a rusty blade and assaulted him when he tried to talk to him. Sudhir's parents and uncle accused Siddharth of doing black magic on their son. They even maltreated him and threatened him to leave their house, "all at once, the third relative rose, grabbed Siddharth's bag, and threw it out of the front door . . . The first uncle . . . began to manhandle him. 'Get out of our house, you chhakka, you homosexual" (143).

Sexuality, according to Michel Foucault, is situated inside power structures and ideologies. In *The History of Sexuality* (1977-1986), he asserted that some categories of sexuality were portrayed as abnormal, immoral, and sinful, and so their adherents were scrutinized. He regarded the sexualized and sexual body as a site of power struggle, in which various agencies such as legislation and science marked and classified the body in specific manners prior to 'acting' upon it. Foucault transferred sexuality beyond the realm of the pure body to discourses and cultures. By labelling certain individuals as aberrant and immoral,

society presents itself as being conventional and secure. As a result, the labelled group is a form of 'social control,' assuming that certain people are intrinsically aberrant. Power controls what is natural and what is unnatural. When Yudi and Milind developed warts on their bodies and went to the doctor, he warned them against unnatural sex. He wonders, "how could the two men be so shameless as to openly admit they had contracted the warts through anal intercourse? 'No unnatural sex, no warts" (Boyfriend 152).

Homophobia in India and the West

Rao in *Criminal Love? Queer Theory, Culture, and Politics in India* (2017) claims that Indian homophobia is different from the West; here both heterosexual and homosexual couples are equally liable for facing violence when caught cuddling up in public places:

> The physical assaults of homosexual men have their equivalent among heterosexuals as well. Homosexuals cuddling up in a public place are not, as it were, bashed up because they are gay, but rather because they are perceived as indulging in 'indecent', 'immoral', and 'corrupting' acts. (78)

He claims that heterosexual actions are capable of performing the same if the couple is from different castes, class backgrounds, religions, or even if there is a significant age gap between them (80). Rao cited an autobiographical incident from 2005, in which he was arrested by policemen for homosexual behavior at Bombay's Chhatrapati Shivaji Station. He offered them Rs. five thousand as a bribe and the policemen, instead of arresting him (since 377 was still there), handed him a list of mobile phone numbers of homosexual men and he was asked to store the numbers. "The numbers will help you gratify your desire" (80), said the policemen. So for Rao, it was an incident of corruption rather than homophobia.

Amara Das Wilhelm claims in the introduction to the book titled *Tritiya-Prakriti: People of the Third Sex: Understanding Homosexuality, Transgender Identity and Intersex Conditions Through Hinduism* (2008) that:

> Hinduism [has] acknowledged a 'third sex', or people who were by nature a combination of male and female, and such people were considered special in many ways. They were thoroughly described in the Kama Shastra and were not punished under the rigid laws of Dharma Shastra. People of the third sex were described as homosexual, transgender, and intersexed persons; they were such by birth and consequently allowed to live their lives according to their own nature. (Wilhelm 2008)

In “Globalizing queer? AIDS, homophobia and politics of sexual identity in India” (2007), Subir K Kole asserts that India is a profoundly polarized country in terms of gender. It is not permissible to mingle the sexes openly, particularly after puberty. Girls are being kept out of school in several areas of rural northern India because they are afraid of associating with the opposite sex. An individual spends a lot of time with others of the same sex in such a society, and friendship or emotional attachment in such a relationship is quite common. Even when sexual relationships develop among such friendships, no one prefers to "come out" of the family to claim their individual autonomy and rights. In this social setting, parents are more likely to approve of same-sex friendship and spaces than of opposite-sex friendship and

mixed-gender spaces. As a result, numerous homosocial behaviors such as sharing a bed, body messaging, hugging, or kissing amongst members of the same-sex community are not considered gay relationships (Kole 14). Rao in *Criminal Love? Queer Theory, Culture, and Politics in India* (2017) claims that in India, man-to-man and woman-to-woman bonding are considered non-sexual, and sexual attraction is still regarded as gender-specific rather than gender-neutral. If two individuals of the same sex demonstrate public intimacy, such as walking hand-in-hand or with arms over each other's shoulders or waists, this is an indication of their yaari and dosti [Indian term for friendship] and, in some situations, masti [mischief]. If they live together, they must be considered roommates; nothing less nor more. On the other hand, if the individuals involved are of opposing sexes, it is automatically assumed to be sexual (82). He argues:

> Heterosexism is today a uniquely Eastern phenomenon. It exists all over the Eastern world. However, in the West, sexual attraction is gender-specific. Hence, the extermination of homosexuals in the concentration camps in Nazi Germany, and the persecution of homosexuals in Greenwich Village, New York City prior to Stonewall riot of 1969. (83)

According to Rao, this fundamental cultural gap between the East and the West can sometimes lead to hilarious (and cosmic) bewilderment, as first-time Western visitors to India who witness men walking hand-in-hand on the streets in broad daylight mistake India for a homosexual utopia or gay paradise. He argues that "heterosexism provides the perfect antidote to homophobia by attacking and destroying its very foundation. It guards the homosexual subject from being recognized and identified, and camouflages his public behaviour" (Criminal Love? 83).

In their book *Same-Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History* (2000), Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai argued that homophobia is of western import rather than homosexuality.

> Modern homophobia was imported from Europe (which had a long history of citing the Bible to torture and execute homosexually inclined people) into India, where, as far as we know, no one had ever been executed for homosexual behavior until 1588 when the Portuguese rulers in Goa burnt a 15-year-old boy for sodomy. The clearest manifestation of this homophobia was the anti-sodomy law introduced into the Indian Penal Code in 1861. (Vanita 2017)

Thus, it may be concluded that homophobia is reversed in India compared to the West, where homophobes are always the others, the mainstream against the minority. In India, however, homophobia is largely internalized. For Rao, Indian homophobia is "cosmetic," not "technical," because homosexuals and heterosexuals are morally identical. Both are hated when found showing public displays of affection, unlike in the West, and if a homosexual comes out, he or she shames their whole extended family and relatives.

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Mythological Portraits with Modern Feminist Values: A Study of Volga's *The Liberation of Sita*

Garima Uniyal
Research Scholar
Department of English, SRT Campus (Badshahithaul)
HNB Garhwal University
Tehri Garhwal (Uttarakhand) India
garimauniyal95@gmail.com

Abstract

This study brings forth twofold experiences, uncritical femininity and critical femininity, of the character of Sita, delineated in Volga's The Liberation of Sita*. Revered as the epitome of a woman and a wife, Sita is studied from a feminist point of view, which allows investigating the subjugation of women during the phase of 'uncritical equality' to the critical phase of self-awakening, liberation and alternative living. The merit of the study lies in exploring how Sita is still relevant to present-day readers. This paper examines the representation of Sita by Volga with a qualitative approach to feminine sensibility. Moreover, it analyses the text to bring out the meaning and message of the character of Sita. Val Plumwood's critique of feminism expressed in Feminism and the Mastery of Nature is incorporated as a methodological tool to assess the progress of the mythological portrayals of Sita, Ahalya, Renuka Devi, Urmila and Surpanakha. The study is limited to observation based on Volga's text-primarily and does not see these portrayals in connection to other fictional representations of the same mythological characters. This is an attempt to analyse and elaborate the character of Sita through the yardsticks of modern feminist literary theories.*
Keywords: Mythological, Uncritical-Femininity, Epitome, Uncritical-Equality, Liberation, Feminism

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Introduction

Sahitya Akademy award-winning Telugu author P. Lalitha Kumari a.k.a. Volga once said that "classical Telugu literature has had a liberal tradition of questioning mythology" (Bajpai). Volga carries forward this inquisitiveness of Telugu literature through her literary endeavour in fictions like *Vimukta*, *Yashodhara*, etc. which "challenge the traditional norms of Indian culture (as mirrored in its mythologies), rethink feminism in that regard; evoking debates, discussions and controversy across the nation" (Joshi). She picks up characters, particularly females from mythology, history or classical literature and puts them on the modern parameters of feminine equality, liberty and opportunity. In her work selected for critical analysis in this paper, she has chosen five characters from the epic *Ramayana*. Her understanding of these characters does not come only from Valmiki's *Ramayana*. She is greatly influenced by the folk Ramayanas and their creative imagination which helped her in

creating a new version of the model characters depicted in mythologies as she admits in an interview "Surpanakha is my own imagination as a Dravidian woman, full of love for nature and people. I tried to bring mythological texture into these stories. I don't want to make my characters very modern but tried to bring change in their thought process" (Joshi). Though for the characterisation of Sita, Volga mostly relies on the original *Ramayana*. *The Liberation of Sita* is not just a faithful rendering or imitation of the story of the original Ramayana but it presents a plot that has relevance for modern readers as the story does not deal with some idealistic agenda to be instilled into the readers. The story incorporates a feminine psyche and sketches a modern version of the characters borrowed from the epic.

In *The Liberation of Sita*, Volga re-imagines the life of Sita after her exile from Ayodhya. The story presents a journey of Sita from bewilderment and self-obliviousness to self-realisation. Volga creates a situation where Sita encounters other characters and gets insights into the women's lives within a patriarchal society. Her meeting with these characters ignites in her a critical feminine approach toward contemporary society. The wisdom and life experience of these women satiate her inquisitions regarding feminine apprehension in a male-dominated society. Through her innovative plot construction, Volga brings the concept of sisterhood to the forefront. She brings all the characters together who have some common experiences to learn from each other. They all bore the atrocities of male-dominated society and now they are seeking liberation. At last, they claim their self-authority and peace of mind by cutting themselves off from society. Their emancipation becomes only possible when they accept their inner self and realise their own orientation in life. Surpanakha looks for beauty which she finds in a perfect garden in the forest; Renuka recognises her talent in art and becomes a wonderful sculptor; after the liberation, Ahalya becomes a sage free from worldly desires and expectations; and Urmila secludes herself and comes to the understanding of the self.

Mythology, certainly, has had a tremendous impact on Indian civilisation since times immemorial where "righteousness" and "greater good" have been disseminated from one generation to the other (Premlatha 40). It also plays an influential part in assigning the role of man and woman in a dichotomised manner where a woman is often seen as subservient to a man. The gendered ideas in mythology widely get disseminated through art, culture, cinema and nowadays through digital media where "the male is by nature superior, and the female inferior" (qtd. in Plumwood 46). The ideal feminine image in Indian literature is shown submissive, impassive, docile, compliant and trustworthy. Projecting the image of woman as 'the new woman' has accelerated after Independence and in this regard, Sita is an iconic female figure for women in marital life in *Bhartiya Sanskriti* (Mohanty 450). She is a symbol of submissiveness, righteousness, domesticity, passivity and feminine devotion toward her husband. Moreover, she is an epitome of an ideal woman/wife in domestic spheres of life. This study highlights the journey of female characters from subjugation to liberation and puts forth the ultimate goal of feminine liberation which Rountree echoes in his ideas i.e. to heal the wounds given by the patriarchy so long (qtd. in Cusack 342).

Theoretical Background

Feminism as a political movement and as a theoretical approach firmly believes that gender construction is not natural but social. The attribution of gender roles to a particular sex is not something predetermined and it does not necessitate that men and women have to behave accordingly. The concept of feminine and masculine, which are qualitative factors, are devised by patriarchal society so that a particular sex may be trained to think and behave in a particular way. Thus, Feminist theory exposes the "mechanism of patriarchy" responsible for the "cultural 'mind-set' in men and women which perpetuated sexual inequality" (Barry 117). Also, Feminist theory looks into the cultural and literary representation of women in society. For this reason, it takes into account history, literature, mythology, and scriptures to study women's place and contribution (also that how they are represented in texts) in society so that it may reveal how unjustly they have been treated by the patriarchal system. Women have been represented as meek, sentimental, and weak who cannot think for themselves. In this regard, Nayar observes, "Cultural texts naturalize the oppression of women through their stereotypical representation of women as weak/vulnerable, seductress, obstacle, sexual object or procreating device" (83).

The researcher opts for feminist theory to analyse the mythological portraits described in *The Liberation of Sita.* Most specifically, Val Plumwood's feministic viewpoint is considered a methodological tool which she succinctly elaborates in her book *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (2003) for the proposed study. She highlights the earlier stage of women when she accepts her position in patriarchal sphere of life with "uncritical equality" syndrome. Plumwood says, ". . . Women, in this strategy, are to join elite men in participation in areas which especially exhibit human freedom, such as science and technology, . . ." but their role still remains confined to what men allows them to perform in any field of production (27-28). This tact helps men to 'naturalise dominance' against women and other subordinates.

Objectives

The objectives of this study are as follows:

To understand the uncritical femininity of mythological portraits and their struggle for the liberation of the self.

To know the significance of mythological femininity in contemporary fictional writing with special reference to *The Liberation of Sita*.

Discussion

The Liberation of Sita is a short collection of five stories focusing on mythological portraits of Sita, Surpanakha, Urmila, Ahalya, and Renuka Devi. But the femininity in this literary piece of work is shown in a very different light with full of independence and care for the self. Sita in this work appears as the one who bears masculine subjugation with an uncritical approach and finally seeks liberation from it. In the first story, "The Reunion", she meets Surpanakha who was punished by Lakshmana for an offense of love for Rama. She felt

grieved and guilty for the consequential adversity Surpanakha would have faced after her physical disfigurement. After meeting Surpanakha in her own beautiful garden, Sita's feminine sensibility seems to question, "Do women exist only to be used by men to settle their score?" (Volga 4). Her sense of questioning is similar to what Draupadi feels in *The Palace of Illusions* that the wife to a husband is not his private property with whom he can treat less than human like a cow or slave (Vanitha 335).

Sita appears bewildered to think of the atrocity and consequential suffering of Surpanakha but to her amazement, Surpanakha looks determined and courageous woman full of wisdom, not a weak person as expected by her guest. She says, "Don't look at how I am today and imagine that all this happened easily, Sita. I have become tough by facing up to the challenges life threw at me. I have been able to find happiness in trying to understand the very meaning of beauty" (Volga 20). It is evident when she shares her experience with Nature where she finds no difference between 'beauty and ugliness, 'moment and stillness, rather it is due to her connection with nature that enlightens her mind "to love everything", "to create, work and serve" so that she can create her own space as suggested Cixous in *The Laugh of the Medusa* (12; qtd. in Vanitha 333).

Meeting with Ahalya opens up a world of wisdom before the eyes of Sita which leaves a powerful impact on her psyche. Ahalya tries to highlight the dual nature of things like pollution/cleanliness, purity/impurity and honour/dishonour which is meant to establish "hierarchical relationships" which Sita realises when she is ordered to give chastity test of fire called *Agnipariksha* (Plumwood 47). When Sita learns of the conduct of Rishi Gautama regarding the maltreatment of Ahalya, she conceives this conduct as a manly right to judge his wife. Ahalya dispels her doubts and says, "Society gave him that authority. I didn't. Till I give it, no one can have that over me" (Volga 28). Ahalya, due to her experience, preaches Sita not to allow any trial over her in future. Nevertheless, Sita accepted the trial later and gave justification to Ahalya that it was for justice's and people's sake. She is proud of Rama's love but Ahalya breaks her faith when she raises a question, "What does conducting an inquiry mean, Sita? Distrust, isn't it? Wouldn't it be better, instead, to believe either your innocence or guilt? . . . All men are the same, Sita" (32).

Ahalya throws light on multiple layers of feministic wisdom which is pertinent to modern women that it is the knowledge of the power structure that men often use for 'evil ends' and thus they design feminine role and conduct in a patriarchal society (Kitzinger 114). According to her, valuing self-esteem, personal emotion and dignity should be the priority of women instead of seeing her identity in relation to men within the society. Sita's psychic affliction regarding the trial of chastity prompts her to ask Ahalya that how long she has to bear disgrace, dishonour and ingratitude (Volga 38). Ahalya replies:

> Till you take decisions for Rama's sake and not yours, it will continue to pursue you, Sita. Look at yourself. You are enduring great pain. You think you are enduring it for the sake of someone else. You think that you have performed your duty for the sake of self-confidence . . . you have surrendered everything to others. What have you saved for yourself? (Volga 38)

Ahalya's objective is to teach Sita that her identity or success is not because of men; on the contrary, she is capable enough to carve her destiny with effort, experience and

learning. She advises Sita to realise her connection to Mother Nature and stop seeing herself solely in the shadow of her husband or sons. She further highlights the gender duality designed with a purpose to see women as 'the other' by men as the agent of power, hierarchy and authority and a woman must develop their leadership qualities to guide other women to know their skills to achieve alternative form of living (Selinger 2; Gillis 64).

The story of Renuka Devi is the finest example of the feminine struggle for creating a 'room of one's own' through art. Her life experience is an artefact of feminine self-belief and power struggle, which has helped her to create an entirely anti-patriarchal model of living, devoid of dualities and power over others. When her son cuts her throat because of his dharma bound action, she realises that motherhood is not a true feminine identity; rather it is her relation to the self. She finally succeeds in establishing a business in the art of sculpting that is incomparable in its beauty with other art forms of sculpture. The life of Renuka, on the whole, preaches Sita and the modern women to become dignified, strengthened and composed with self-belief and skill. Sita, finally, starts coming out with a modern concept of equity at par excellence with man. When Lava and Kusa ask for their father during their stay in Valmiki's ashram and wishes to learn the art of warfare. She tells them she is proficient enough to teach them as she is equally talented as Rama. She says:

> . . . I'm a kshatriya woman, am I not?'
> But women don't fight wars, do they?
> 'When necessary, they'll do anything. I'm adept to all those skills. From tomorrow, I'm not only mother but also your teacher.' The children jumped for joy. (Volga 57)

Sita realises her mistreatment as she was put under trial and disowned by her husband. Likewise Ahalya and Renuka are also the victims of "mistrust and humiliation" (Ahall 11; Volga 65). Sita, in the end, rejects all the obligations toward Rama as he summons her to the court to prove her claim of motherhood after realising that he has two kids with Sita. Her character turns anti-patriarchal and instead of visiting the court, she leaves the Ashram and disowns both motherhood and wifehood to satisfy her inclination, rights and freedom.

The title of the fourth story entitled "The Liberated" is highly symbolic for women to understand the values such as freedom of one's own choice, the dignity of self, and effort for self-happiness. The story revolves around the character of Urmila, whom Lakshmana forsakes to accompany Rama in exile without giving any consideration to her emotions at the time of departure to the forest. Meanwhile, she stays and waits inside the palace for fourteen years to be reunited with her husband. To Sita, after fourteen years, Urmila appears an altered woman of wisdom. The conversation between Sita and Urmila is focused on understanding the value of solitude in the life of a woman. Initially, she felt sorrow and anger within her, however, as the time proceeded, she told Sita ". . . I began to observe my body, my thoughts, and the emotions they triggered within me. . . . I desired solitude. Not loneliness, solitude. The solitude in which I could converse within and with myself" (Volga 75). Moreover, Urmila straightforwardly tells Sita that her further relationship with Lakshmana depends on how much significance he offers to her modified conscience.

Findings

The crux of this study is that these mythological portraits in modern attire have become more relevant to modern women and readers, most specifically while presenting the character of Sita with the self-investigation of *Paativratyam* dharma and finally seeking liberation from wifehood as well as motherhood. One of the formidable points, the researcher finds, in this study is that the care for the self is much more important than the duties she performs in the domestic spheres of life as a wife or mother. Nourishment of the feminine role either as mother or wife at the cost of self-esteem, care, wisdom, and dignity lead to a neurotic state. The researcher also extracts from this study that the life of a woman could be prosperous only in a condition if she strongly values herself and liberates herself from patriarchal boundations not out of hypercriticism but for the sake of justice. The feeling of sisterhood as endorsed by Robin Morgan is commonly noticed among all female characters due to their similar subjugation by the "oppressive structure of Big Brother" (qtd. in Narain 241). There is a sharp attack on the concept of dharma misused by men against women. All the mythological figures portrayed in this collection of stories possess a strong feminist sensibility, "Surpanakha, Ahalya, Renuka, Urmila – each one had a story of her own. . . . Her path, her way, was hers alone" is the objective of their life for themselves (Volga 63).

Conclusion

Mythological femininity plays a great role in fictional writing where the female authors find the liberty to look at the feminine figure as per their critical lens. Therefore, Sita from Valmiki's *Ramayana* remains relevant to the writers, readers and researchers in the field of academia. Her representation has been experimented with a lot in the recent past by different writers like Amish Tripathi, Devdutt Pattnaik, Samhita Arni, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni but Volga in *The Liberation of Sita* presents not only Sita but her sister Urmila, Surpanakha, Ahalya and Renuka Devi with a strong feminist sensibility where all of them liberate themselves from the patriarchal boundations and confined femininity. Mythological femininity interwoven with quite different situations appears interesting for modern readers. Volga, thus, succeeds in making them more relevant to modern women by projecting them as the mouthpiece of feminism. Rather than presenting her characters before readers as passive, dependent, submissive and docile, she delineates a powerful picture of the female figure with a brilliant egalitarian sense of care and affection for everyone and everything in their surroundings. The liberated world of all the female characters endorses the liberation moment to be completely free from the imposed ideas of motherhood, wifehood and domesticity. Urmila, Ahalya, Renuka Devi and Surpanakha appear as the sticking forces in Sita's mindset that have helped her to distinguish between uncritical equality and critical equality.

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Women and Mythology: Analyzing the Retelling of the *Mahabharata* by Irawati Karve

Sujata Rath
Research Scholar, Faculty of Arts
Communication and Indic Studies, Sri Sri University
Cuttack (Odisha) India
sujata.rath1973@gmail.com

Dr. Krishna Pratap Singh
Associate Professor, Faculty of Arts
Communication and Indic Studies, Sri Sri University
Cuttack (Odisha) India
krishna.s@srisriuniversity.edu.in

Abstract

The mythical discourse has been classified as male-centered, which indicates that mythological stories frequently laud and admire masculine strength. Women, on the other hand, have been represented as passive puppets, with roles as victims or quiet onlookers, with no indication of feminine power or even female nature as such. The lack, or rather unfavorable representation, of women in literature has been a source of concern for feminist writers. As a result, they aim to re-read patriarchal myths, and in the process, they tend to reinvent the literary canon as well as depict women from a female perspective. This paper examines the postmodern writer Irawati Karve's rewriting of Hindu mythology as one of the most important places for the formation of ideological subjects. The modern retellings, according to this article, have violated the phallogocentric male canon's ideological boundaries and produced an alternative feminine discourse by placing women in a conjured up female community and history. It demonstrates patriarchy's use of mythical writings to legitimize its rule over women, and it suggests that they confuse the multifarious character of female identities. The goal of this study is to look at how feminist authors used myth to learn about the power and endurance of the diverse cast of mortal and immortal female characters who appear in folktales, legends, and mythology through their portrayals.
Keywords: Myth, Feminist, Writers, Retelling, Male- Centred

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Introduction

The rewriting of Indian epics has seen a gradual movement from the ordinary, obedient, 'sanskari' women narrative to strong, 'real' women who are spirited, self-motivated, and who stand up for themselves despite the controlling patriarchy of their times, thanks to a surfeit of women writers taking center stage now. Myths are created from the parables we tell, and they take on a life of their own, helping to shape our self-perception. The courageous, tenacious women who, despite being deemed incapable of education and a profession, and

having denied the right to vote, rose by their ability and encountered life head-on have inspired and encouraged so many women to take up writing.

Myths are origin stories that are every so often related to the origin of cultures. They're means of understanding occurrences that the ancients couldn't explain, and they're founded on common experiences and knowledge. It is familiar in the myth genre for a supernatural figure or power to intervene in social issues. When there is backing for such ideas from surrounding rituals, communities preserve their belief in myths. Myths occur as a metaphysical, pragmatic, and virtuous component of humans showing us possible worlds. They encourage the person who reads or spectator to understand, develop, and negotiate a specific semiosis, and they emphasize "the evident elsewhereness of meaning" as one of its key qualities. (Wallace and Hirsch 11)

Friedrich Nietzsche relied on both Apollo and Dionysus, Sigmund Freud on Oedipus and Narcissus, Herbert Marcuse on Narcissus and Orpheus, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno on Odysseus, Jacques Lacan on Antigone, and Maurice Blanchot on Orpheus, to name a few. Closer to the present, Mara Zambrano, Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler, Adriana Cavarero, and Tina Chanter have all presented detailed readings of Antigone as the central figure in a feminist ethical-political fantasy. As far as female writers are concerned, Irigaray's work is a vital source in the re-examination of the underpinnings of the representational method in Greek mythos and catastrophes. In writings by immensely significant established thinkers in the memoir of Occidental viewpoint, Irigaray expounds on the indicators of Occidental culture's decay—feminine suppression. Simone de Beauvoir, feels that "Women have no chivalrous legends in which their ventures are reflected, they still visualize through the visions of males. Deities made by males are the divinities they worship" (Wallace and Hirsch, 13). *The Mahabharata* is also said to have been written by sage Vyasa, who was present at many of the events and witnessed many of them. Valmiki's *Ramayana* was similar. "Both were men. Replace these ideal male-created mythical models with 'replacement models' as a possible answer to this problem" (Nakhare Kriti 168).

> Building a replacement model is challenging. It is not possible to escape the notion of conditioning with which one has been brought up with. We won't be able to build replacement models until we create new myths. We all admire Sita and Savitri for doing something out of devotion and commitment. Can we disavow them if we don't like it today? Because we can't escape myths, substitute models must be built in the structure of the myths we already have. (Nahal 169)

Therefore, we have our own Indian writers who seldom consider the status of women in mythology nor their prowess as writers who have a view of their own. There is no feminist viewpoint in Hindu mythology. Epics such as the "Ramayana" and "Mahabharata" have been narrated to generations as real words of God, instructing men on how to live happy life. What about women, though? However, everything improved with the emergence of Dr. Irawati Karve on the Indian literary scene in the early 1900s. When Indian sociology was first established, Irawati Karve was a stalwart in the field. Making a name for herself in a male-dominated field was no simple task, but Karve's expertise in her field aided her in this endeavour.

Irawati Karve's award-winning collection of essays *Yuganta: The End of an Epoch* gives the Mahabharata's larger-than-life figures a very human presence. She examines and investigates the motivations behind events, highlighting the characters' gray areas rather than portraying them as black or white.

Character Portrayal in *Yuganta*

Yuganta examines several Mahabharata versions critically, attempting to decipher character arcs and motives. Karve was an anthropologist, and she approaches the source with the thought that it recounts actual people and events, but with a layer of myth and numerous subsequent and less accurate parentheses.

Iravati Karve is well known for her dystopian novel *Yuganta: The End of an Epoch*. She is a committed feminist and a great writer. Karve's ardent followers, conversely, know that she has dabbled in mythos and that many of her works reflect this. She's confronted existing chauvinism and given exposure to women who are frequently represented as forever submissive by presenting her work on iconic figures from old mythology like Draupadi, Kunti, and Gandhari. Not just the female personalities from "The Mahabharat" that she has dispensed with such ruthlessness but also celebrated figures like "Bhisma", Pitahmah," "Karna," "Yudhistir" and above all "Vasudev Krishna."

She begins by examining Bhishma, the clan's great-grandfather, who was the Kuru line's final member biologically. She discusses his fixation with keeping his promise to be celibate for the rest of his life. She wonders if it was truly necessary with no other man in the household. And the purpose he made his legendary commitment. She then goes on to describe the suffering of numerous women because of Bhishma. He forced them to go through Niyoga or abducted them to marry his family's men. Or when he stayed quiet while they were being undressed. She also wonders if he was indeed the valiant warrior that he is portrayed to be. And she backs up her claim with examples.

The two great mothers are then discussed in the next two chapters which focus on Gandhari and Kunti's injustices. Karve explains here the two Kshatriya women's fortitude and the part they played in tying the Kuru fraternity together.

Karna's personality is also examined in depth. Karve provides a less-glorious portrait of Karna, who is often portrayed as a pitiful hero in popular Mahabharat interpretations. Despite his rare displays of character strength, Karna is a flawed man, according to Karve, because of his inner resentment and rashness. In Karve's book, Krishna is also examined from a human standpoint. Karve portrays him as more of Arjuna's buddy and a well-wisher for the Pandavas than a celestial creature.

"Father and son?" is an intriguing section that explores the crucial figure of Vidura and the idea that he is Yudhishtir's (or Dharma as he is referred to in this book) father. Karve draws our awareness to various character parallels between the two, as well as the tradition of the period in which the younger sibling was permitted to sleep with his older brother's wife if the older brother was unable to conceive children. Apart from an unclear section at the end of the epic announcing that Vidura and Yudhishtir are but one since they are both Lord Yama's reincarnations, the author uses Vidura's passion for Yudhishtir and his unwavering devotion to Kunti as evidence. Gandhari and Kunti are rarely given the attention they deserve in retellings, but this novel is an exception. Kunti is handled with great regard.

The segment on Vidura also delves into the existing caste system, social roles, and stringent obedience to these rules. The chapter on Drona and Ashwathama expands on this, where she feels despite being Brahmins they undertook the job of the Kshatriyas and hence says "Para dharma Bhayavaha".

While diving into these individuals and presenting them in the composition of the storyline, the core story thread is indeed delivered on a straightforward level. Gandhari, Kunti, and Draupadi are three of the epic's most powerful personalities, and the author

evaluates their influence and effect. Kunti and Gandhari, the mother figures of the Pandava and Kauravas fighting clans, were both formidable matriarchs. Despite all the intrigues and complications, these two mothers kept their clans together, even though their lives were completely different.

Kunti is well-known for being the matriarch of the legendary five brothers. Yet, from an early age, she has seen one adversity after another, forcing her to either face and combat or die. She opted to remain staunchly by the men in her life, whether it was to live with an infected spouse or offspring who were permanently cursed to be overthrown and forced to live as ascetics. The Pandavas battled throughout their lives, they had to deal with societal seclusion, self-imposed exile, and battles at every turn. Moments were there when their self-confidence was at an all-time low. "Kunti' was a highly powerful lady in these situations, rousing people to rise and battle rather than wasting time lazing around. If it hadn't been for this matriarch's steely resilience, our legendary warriors would have perished. Draupadi is the most well-known feminine personality of them all. It was her bravery in questioning Yudhishtir when she was about to be hauled into the Kurus' court and ridiculed in front of the packed multitude that made her stand out. Draupadi, along with Kunti, was the coalescing force that united the brothers and sought to push them towards their objective. Kunti's pain and empathy at Draupadi's insult by Duryodhan and his brother Duhshasan led her to incite her sons to fight for justice and retribution and claim their rightful inheritance—even if it meant going to war with close family and friends. Being a respectable woman herself, she was unable to overlook the humiliation of her daughter-in-law in front of everyone.

Gandhari was a good woman who never deliberately urged her sons to enrage the Pandava brothers, even though she was aware that they were weaker than their relatives, the Pandavas, and might not get the opportunity to control the kingdom. Instead, she was cautious of Duryodhana's ongoing attempts to annoy the Pandavas and concocted plans to have them killed with the help of his uncle Shakuni. But she failed miserably in her attempts to instil good morals in her sons, and she regretted it.

However, it may be noted here that though Draupadi fights for herself in the court for her dignity, Karve derides her for raising her voice. According to Karve, she should have pleaded with them politely.

Feminist Retelling of SomeFamous Myths

Antigone's Claim by Judith Butler:

Feminist philosopher and critical theorist Butler utilises the story of Antigone by Sophocles to examine feminist notions of kinship and citizenship. The essay is worthwhile to read for Butler's ethical musings on the query, "What constitutes a liveable life?" since it is as deep and challenging as all of Butler's language. Antigone is forced to choose between resisting her society's patriarchal rules and running the risk of death. In order to connect with the works of Hegel, Lacan, Irigaray, and other influential thinkers, Butler uses the myth as a springboard. She draws a parallel between Antigone's position and the current world, where there are growing numbers of people who lack full citizenship both within and between states. These individuals aren't given full "human" status because they aren't being accepted into legitimate society. As a result, they continue to haunt our public sphere as a "shadowy world," just like Antigone haunts Creon's state. It's a complex, wide-ranging essay that gives the myth

a powerful, and contemporary meaning for politics.

Anne Carson, Autobiography of Red:

The story of Herakles' eleventh labor—stealing the herd of cattle that belonged to a winged red monster named Geryon—is retold in this "novel in poetry" by one of Canada's most renowned living poets. In Carson's rendition, the monster is the main character who is deceived and abandoned by Herakles. This novel is driven by the astounding beauty of the language. Carson keeps the tale in the magnificent and otherworldly categories.

"The Laugh of the Medusa" by Helene Cixous:

This article, which was written by a French feminist writer, and was published in the magazine Signs, became her most well-known piece. It did this by capitalising on and refuting 20th-century ideas of Medusa as a symbol of female wrath. To provide a place for women's voices in the "phallocentric" literary and critical tradition, it mobilises (some could say essentialist conceptions of Womanhood). It is a classic manifesto of second-wave feminism. The remarkable aspect of this essay is Cixous's spiraling, poetic prose, which both reflects and executes the singular ecriture feminine she describes. Cixous asserts that for women's writing to truly impact society, it must be rooted in their female bodies, unrestricted, and shameless: "There is always within [woman] a little of that good mother's milk."

Myth in a Retelling

What is the point of using myth to enhance a tale that purports to be based on true events? According to GN Devy, the *Mahabharata* is "without a doubt, a way of recalling previous events," but "to endow that recounting with dignity and grandeur, the story is depicted as though all the happenings that occur in it belong to a timeless and ever-present age" (71).

Literature, like any narrative, tends to favour some voices, ideas, and perspectives over others. Unless we're talking about an explicitly revolutionary book, the favoured voices will frequently mirror the social, economic, and cultural hierarchy of the society that produced the work in question. "Karve is certain that the events described in the *Mahabharata* occurred – that they are historical events; she is certain that most of the characters in the epic are real people – that they are not superhumans – that they are frail; that they have emotions; that they have strengths and weaknesses. What they did and what occurred happened for a purpose" (Nath 2)

Karve uses the *Mahabharata* to analyse civilization and societal ties that perhaps occurred millenial of years ago in northern India. She then makes a comparison between north Indian civilization and Greek society during the period. Many other writers too have tried various ways and means of portraying this epic in their own way. So, Ramanjum says "What number of *Mahabharatas* have we heard, seen, or read? According to A K Ramanujan, no Hindu ever peruses the *Mahabharata* for the first time" (Lal 3).

The epic, or one of its many variations, is usually taught to children as a bedtime The Kuru clan's narrative is told in a variety of ways, including comic books, films, and television. The epic, in written form, arrives considerably later in the mindscape, and is usually composed in the mother tongue, with Sanskrit appearing only infrequently. "A *Mahabharata*

emerges from the multiple meetings as a distinct and personalised text. That is why Ramanujan stated that the *Mahabharata* is a tradition rather than a book" (Lal 1)

> Is there a single "*Mahabharata*" myth or several of them? Do they occur on similar scales? Is there, for example, a wonderful myth that stems from the "Vyasa canon?" Is it acceptable to disregard oral storytelling and dialogic manuscripts that exist outside of the "Vyasa" principle as minor forms?
>
> Bheel Bharath is an oral version of the *Mahabharata* retained by the Bheels, a Gujarati tribal group. Bhagawandas Patel, who collated the book after learning the ancient song from ancestral seniors, casts doubt on the Vyasa canon's higher standing. (Patel, 147).

The epic's popularity provides a key to understanding how India has been portrayed. In Yuganta, an insightful interpretation of Vyasa's *Mahabharata* is given. Irawati Karve tells how the epic arose from a triumphant ballad known as Jaya.

The Mahabharata has stayed faithful to its ancient roots. It has been explained in an array of approaches, some of which challenge established ideas and practises and others that follow them. Some of the oral versions have become holy texts, passed down word by a verse from teacher to disciple. The performative texts are constantly updated and made to suit changing times. Writers and actors have used the epic narrative to recount and reflect on human quandaries and forebodings in the literary tradition. "Novels by S L Byrappa, V S Khandekar, and M T Vasudevan Nair, as well as Rahi Mazoom Raza's screenplay for the B R Chopra TV serial, Peter Brooke's stage adaptation, and countless Kathakali plays. Vyasa "is believed to be immortal" (Lal 2). We have Mahasweta Devi's Draupadi or rather Dopdi Mejhen, in her short story titled "*Draupadi"* where Dopdi is a member of the Santhal tribe who is susceptible to injustice, battles against it with unflinching resolve and bravery, even attempting to dismantle long-standing systems of racial and gender inequality much like the Draupadi of the *Mahabharata*. (Sinha1).

The epic has taken on a life of its own, inspiring communal and individual imaginations, and has become a tradition. So many *Mahabharatas* have been written, and there will be many more to come. (Lal 4).

Conclusion

Since its inception, people have read and explained the *Mahabharata* in several methods. Many have gone even further, adapting the *Mahabharata*'s tale to produce a fresh and original retelling. Some people have chosen a personality from the *Mahabharata* and written the narrative from that character's perspective. Since time immemorial, the *Mahabharata* has piqued the Indian literary imagination. The Indian method of thinking about and understanding texts has been impacted by a plethora of classical and folk renditions of this epic in many genres.

In Yuganta, Karve, an anthropologist, explores the humanity of the *Mahabharata*'s great figures, with all their merits and failings, and deconstructs them in a manner that they appear real and human. Women are establishing their territory, unlearning intergenerational conditioning, and lifting their voices to demand fairness after decades of the feminist movement's tiny and huge victories. With these mythologies being retold, it's critical to extend the narrative, read the stories from many viewpoints, and initiate new dialogues.

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Mahasweta Devi's "Breast Stories": The Emergence of Women as Symbols of Resistance and Creator of New Myths

Dr. Tamali Neogi
Assistant Professor of English
Gushkara College
Gushkara (West Bengal) India
tamalineogi13@gmail.com

Abstract

Mahasweta Devi's "Breast Stories", the collection of three powerful subaltern narratives, questions the hypocrisy of social systems by investing female body with symbolic significations. The thread that ties the three stories, "Draupadi", "Breast Giver" and "Behind the Bodice" is the abuse and subjugation of women - women who stand at the centre of disruptive social structures, change, protest and rebellion, women who are tortured yet do not know to accept defeat. Besides, all three stories are marked by Devi's attempt to deconstruct the old myths to critique hypocritical, authoritative patriarchal society, to unmask the contemporary situation and to understand the position of the marginalised women in the larger social framework. The purpose of the author here is to understand how in Devi's "Breast Stories" women, though brutally abused, can convert their bodies into weapons to register their protests. The author through critical analysis of the three stories, finds that to present these women, suffering human beings who try to protest, Devi not only deconstructs old myths but she in actuality constructs new ones to portray the contemporary counterparts of graceful women of classical myths, thereby giving rise to the dialectics of margin versus centre.
Keywords: protest, resistance, Breast Stories, myths.

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Introduction

The exploitation of tribal people, the mechanisms of oppression and resistance of the oppressed, particularly those of women, form the major strands of Mahasweta Devi's 'Breast Stories.' It is a collection of three powerful subaltern narratives, "Draupadi," "Breast Giver" and "Behind the Bodice." Interestingly in all three stories, female bodies come to symbolically represent change, protest, rebellion, 'ulgulan.'The engaging aesthetics of Devi's protest literature that gives rise to the dialectics of margin versus centre, necessitates the deconstruction(reconstruction) of classical myths both to protest against the hypocritical society, the patriarchal hegemony, the caste/class/gender-based exploitation of the tribal population, and to present their hopes, aspirations and fights.

The Gap Identified

Considerable critical interest is directed towards Mahasweta Devi's protests against the exploitation of female bodies. The "Breast Stories" symbolically signify how the female body instead of being the weakest part of her existence, is used by the marginalised woman to register her protest against oppression. The critics train their lenses on Devi's deconstruction of old myths but tend to be blissfully silent on Devi's significant creation of new myths.

The Objectives

The purpose of the author here is twofold: first, the author intends to see how in Devi's "Breast Stories" the marginalised women rise to protest, by converting their bodies into weapons, to combat oppression, torture and disruptive socio-economic and political forces. Next, the author wishes to examine how Devi, in whose writing tribal 'anubhawa' (experience) has always received importance over 'anumana' (speculation), attempts to understand the position of women in a larger social framework. The "Breast Stories," is a fine illustration of Devi's protest aesthetics encompassing the deconstruction of classical myths, the creation of new myths through the adaptation of old myths to contemporary times. The methodology comprises the critical and in-depth study of Mahasweta Devi's "Breast Stories."

Mahasweta Devi's Protest Literature

One of the major concerns of Devi's *oeuvre is to* examine the power structures that cause the 'stratification of traditionally marginalized groups.' Her writings are deeply anchored in her firsthand experience of life and living of Santhal, Kheria and Lodha tribes of Singhbhum, Ranchi, Palamau and Chaibase districts of Jharkhand and of Bengal and Bihar border. In Bengal, the feminist discourse largely centres around Devi's powerful tales, the protest literature representing the trials and tribulations of marginalized and exploited tribes. In an attempt to define protest the critic says:

> It is not identical to an attitude of refusal. Protest transcends the primary impulse to refuse and it transfuses it into an activity of turmoil . . . in a world of callous and contemptuous circumstances, it is the manifestation of a cry for human concern and secondly, it is an endeavour to add meaning to human existence by way of strengthening the concept of social justice, equality and liberty. So protest is a medium through which a veritable testimony to contemporary times is achieved. (Mohan 94)

Rufus Browning observes: "Protest is the expression of human spirit and human spirit is the agent of eventual subversion. Protest springs out of human spirit and a protester uphold human rights and civil liberties. His is the way of confronting the system and he always feels at variance with the authoritarian trends" (Browning 241). Protest literature aims to "speak for the historically oppressed and to record the injustices heaped. It demands justice for those whose rights were usurped and retributed against the oppressor . . . It can be seen as an

alternative version of events that have led to present socio-political situations" ("Sharma"). John Stauffer says: "I define protest literature broadly to mean the uses of language to transform the self and change society" ("Sharma"). Another critic observes: "The aesthetics of protest literature would "avoid or target classical myths and symbols; would replace the traditional protagonist with the tribal protagonist; would threaten the existing system based on bias. . ." (Singh 2). Devi justifies violence as a form of protest by saying "When the system fails an individual has a right to take to violence or any other means to get justice" (Devi xii). The protest in Devi's stories often turns violent. G. N. Devy observes: "They face exploitation at the hands of the landlords, government officials, policemen and moneylenders. Almost invariably her protagonists turn violent towards the end of her stories. There is the progressive kind of violence" (Devy xii).

"Draupadi"- Protest and Subversion of Old Myth

The very title of the short story, 'Draupadi,' is extremely interesting. Draupadi, is the divine woman who springs from the sacrificial power, the wife of the Pandavas, the paragon of beauty whose attempted disrobing initiates the great war in *Mahabharata.* In aristocratic and mainstream Hindu society a woman is considered to be the property or possession of her husband. We are not allowed to forget, as Bakshi notices, that:

> . . . upon being summoned, her first reaction is that of disbelief that her husband, a king no less, can stake his wife and she says Yudhisthira must have been stupefied by the intoxication for the game. She sends the summoner back to the Sabha to ask Yudhisthira, who had lost first, himself or her? After reaching the Sabha she asks 16 times the same question but remains unanswered ("Bakshi").

The question that haunts is, can a self be owned? Dopdi (the name Draupadi in tribal pronunciation) Mejhen is an illiterate tribal woman. Rajni Dwivedi says: "Mahasweta Devi in her way to rewrite this episode has attempted the deconstruction and reconstruction of the mythic figure of Draupadi, as a tribal Dopdi was not entitled a heroic name, this pious name was given to her by the Brahmin mistress. The aboriginal Dopdi's name signifies the mark of her distance from the top" (Dwivedi 242). Yet Dopdi leads the politicized life amongst all. She is engaged in an armed struggle for the rights and freedom of the tribal people. Being a tribal means she occupies the lowest rank in a class-based society. However, quite interestingly the ideologies of feminism are practiced spontaneously and naturally by tribals for ages as those are ingrained in the texture of their culture. Malhotra, while researching the status and social role of tribal women in their community vis a vis feminist theories [the study is based on 62 tribes of Koraput district in Odissa], concludes how equality between the two sexes is already existing in the tribal communities since long ("Malhotra"). The point to be noted is, the status and respect women are accorded in tribal society is far superior to that of women in mainstream Hindu society. When we first see Dopdi, she is not a victim but is equal to men who are fighting for their rights. Obviously, Dravidian culture is upheld contrary to Aryan culture. Does Mahasweta indicate that in a liberal socialistic democratic country only women can attain equality in the true sense? We further think of the probability that the

phenomenon called disrobing of Draupadi is in *Mahabharata*, to impart the moral lesson that faith is rewarded. Draupadi had faith in Lord Krishna. She wholeheartedly surrendered and He in return prevented her from being disrobed and humiliated. Don't we find here a glorification of a male god who offers her garment endlessly? It is rightly observed that "He is the same male god who steals the clothes of the *gopis* and hangs them on the trees by the river where they are bathing" ("Sattar") in another episode titled 'Vastraharana.' Traditionally a man is considered to be the food and cloth giver/provider to a woman. Undoubtedly, this ideology is maintained in the epic when the male god rescues Draupadi. Lord Krishna helps Draupadi but the question is why after the attempted disrobing Draupadi says to Krishna: "I have no husbands, no sons, no relations. I have no brothers, no father. And I do not have even you, Krishna?" ("Chaitanya"). The author's point is Draupadi with such realization is never to be considered submissive. The next obvious question is why Draupadi is constantly referred to in today's context?

Finally, apprehended by the army, Dopdi is tortured and raped throughout that night. After the brutalities, Dopdi doesn't complain or wail or behave like a helpless victim. In the morning she simply refuses to put on clothes. She walks naked towards Senanayak in the open daylight, very uplifted and straight. She says: "What's the use of clothes? You can strip me, but how can you clothe me again? Are you a man . . . There isn't a man here that I should be ashamed of. I will not let you put my cloth on me. What more can you do? Come on, counter me – come on, counter me? Draupadi pushes Senanayak with her two mangled breasts and for the first time Senanayak is afraid of standing before an unarmed target, terribly afraid" (Devi 402). The points of similarities between the two are to be noted here: (1) Both Draupadi and Dopdiare 'objects,' 'targets,' 'unarmed,' and (2) Bodies are assaulted in both cases, political engagement being the pretext. The only point of difference is one takes the vow to avenge herself and the other uses her unarmed body as a weapon to protest. But the question is, was Draupadi fully a victim? The author's point is Draupadi ceases to be a mere victim and attains the level of an empowered woman when just before the attempted disrobing she asserted herself by saying: "you can disrobe me but you can neither fathom nor touch my inner connection with the divine" ("Iyer"). Devi adapts the myth to contemporary times and refers to Draupadi as archetypal 'Shakti.' To the author, it is her honourable decision that she employs her husbands who were observing her dishonour without any protest– to avenge her cause. Isn't it a greater, more powerful assertion of her authoritative self, ignoring which the patriarchal society has tried to humiliate her body? Enraged by the insults Draupadi took the vow that she will never oil or tie her hair until she bathed her hair with the blood of Dusshasana, a vow that is alarming to everyone present in the assembly. Thus, Draupadi never tied her hair after the incident and her open hair kept on reminding the Pandavas about the insult which in turn, triggers the great war. Thus, Draupadi herself becomes the embodiment of revenge in her new look, in her fearlessness, in her uncompromising nature, and her burning passion for retaliation. Mahasweta Devi's 'Draupadi' cannot be read simply as a deconstruction of the myth of Draupadi just to show what Draupadi could not be in the patriarchal text, *Mahabharata*. Draupadi as the image of 'Shakti' is extremely relevant in today's context and that is why she is being referred to in the short story. The inter-textual connection of the short story and the old myth should be interpreted in this spirit and not as the

latter creation merely the deconstruction of the former work.

Myth Making

On the other hand, if we think of the setting of the story it may appear to us that "Draupadi", the short narrative, manifests Devi's myth-making impulse. It is 1970s Bengal. On account of Naxal issue, the amount of torture the adivasis have to undergo is evident in the Facebook post (later deleted) of Varsha Dongre, Deputy Superintendent of the Raipur Central Jail. ". . . entire villages are burnt and women are raped to push the tribals out of their land and to take control of the forests. If tribal women are suspected to be naxalites, their breasts are squeezed to check if they are lactating." Varsha Dongre's question is "the way the protectors of the country rape their daughters, burn their houses and send them to prison in false cases, who do they turn to for justice?" She further adds: "I have witnessed 14 and 16-year-old tribal girls being stripped naked in police stations and tortured. They were given electric shocks on their wrists and breasts. I have seen the marks. It horrifies me to the core" ("The Wire Staff"). The experience of Ms Sori, the 'absolutely extraordinary, fearless and tremendously articulate' activist of Chattisgarh, confirms the information of sexual torture by police in jail. She says: "I was often made to sit naked in my cell. And then one day stones were inserted in my private pars. I thought this was the end" ("Arya"). The experience of Kawasi Hidme, the villager of Borguda village, Dantewada district, Chhattisgarh again is the same. On the suspicion of being a naxalite she was arrested and taken to Konta police station.

> They locked me up in a room, tied my hands and hit me for hours. I asked for water but they refused. One day I was badly beaten. That night, I was raped by three policemen. The torture had left me so weak that I couldn't even tell them to stop, let alone resist them. I bled profusely. ("Thomas")

These accounts of police torture of tribal women match with that of what happened to Dopdi and the other comrades. Devi's experience of the sexual assaults the Adivasi women have to face leads her to create a new myth centered on a tribal heroine. Dopdi thus becomes a new metaphor of protest so that in today's context one should not always necessarily go back to the classical metaphor of Shakti, Draupadi, but can simultaneously refer to the tribal heroine Dopdi. Therefore, in her short story "Draupadi", Devi revives the existing myth and at the same time creates a new myth, her modus operandi being as she says: "It is essential to revive existing myths adapt them to the present times and following the oral tradition, create new ones as well. While I find the existing mythologies, epic and 'Puranas' interesting, I use them with new interpretations" (Dwivedi 243). It is observed that: "One of the most notable features of Mahasweta Devi's writing is the visionary, utopian or myth-making impulse that acts as a counterbalance to her dystopian, 'forensic', critical perspectives on the contemporary world" (Chakravarty viii).

"Breast Giver"- Protest and Inversion of Old Myth

In "Breast Giver", Kangalicharan's wife Jashoda, is forced by the circumstances to

become the wage-earner of the house, following the accident in which her husband loses legs. Originally the mother of three, becomes the wet-nurse of Halder family. Devi leaves no scope to overlook the distinction between a mere wet-nurse and a 'professional mother' who actually becomes 'the mother of the world.' For twenty-five years Jashoda weaned till she loses her reproductive capacity which leads to the eventual loss of her usefulness; she is discarded and is left to be rotten till she receives gruesome death of breast cancer. The elder Halder-his son mortifies him while his Studebaker rolls over the legs of Kangali, a Brahmin and a priest of the highest caste- becomes the patron of Kangali's family. But when he dies the livelihood of Kangali's family faces serious challenges. The failure of the settlements of the patriarchal family constraints Jashoda to become the breast-giver. She gets the 'million rupees worth proposition' from the mistress of the Halder family that in return for food, clothes, and shelter which in turn gives a raise to her hierarchical position, she is to become the wet nurse of her grandchildren. Being the mother, she is not unaware of the requirements of her sons that for gratification of their physical needs they like their wives to retain their 'good shape.'

It is the need of men—be it Kangali or those of Halder household, which allows Jashoda to occupy the position of man in society. The consequent role reversal takes place in Kangali's house-the woman earns, and enjoys a prestigious position, and the man cooks. Her full breasts have for years satisfied Kangali's lust and now having no other alternative she is to employ them to feed her family. Her whole reproductive system becomes involved to continue with her job, she in almost every one and half year is to give birth to one baby for having the fullest supply of milk. Thus, in the next twenty-five years she milks so many-twenty of her own and fifty others that she becomes a mother by profession, mother of the world full of the children whom she has given her breasts. Jashoda is believed to have prophetic dreams when patriarchal society is to fulfil its demands through her employment but surprisingly no prophetic dream saves her from her rejection. Jashoda by her efficiency changes the air of this Halder house. She is considered by society as a sacred mother, the holy mother, and the chief fruitful woman. Not only so, but the children also reared on her milk are considered sacred. Jashoda's breasts become the primary agency that offers sustenance to her own family. She is discarded by Halder family when she fails to comply with the terms and conditions of patriarchy. Most of the critics have viewed the daughter-in-law as the agent of oppression as they seem to abandon her when her utility is over. R. Devika remarks, “women that employ Jashoda are playing a role in oppressing her contradicts the feminist notion of 'sisterhood as a mode of resisting patriarchy. The women are taking place of a man or a husband and continuing the oppression that Jashoda may have felt in her home” (“Devika”). But the author thinks that when the last baby of the family is weaned and the air of change visits the family causing the change in the joint family structure, the need for a patriarchal society that has earlier given her sustenance for its benefits is already over. The daughters-in-law are equally the victims of this society as they are to give birth endlessly and at the same time retain the thinness of their bodies for which they are deprived of the pleasure of feeding their babies. Earlier the Halder mistress was able to employ Jashoda as hers and her sons' objectives matched each other. The new mistress is to discard Jashoda as she loses her usefulness because of the men of her family who are the actual, ultimate and prime decision-

makers in our society.

The mythical Jashoda enjoys extreme honour though she rears only one and the subaltern Jashoda is abandoned brutally only to die the most horrible and painful death. Is it because the mythical one is the mother of a male god or is it because she holds the central position in society being the wife of the chieftain of Gokul? The mythical one is biologically the mother of one but the subaltern one is the biological mother of many. It means though the pain of childbearing is experienced by her twenty times and that too to support her family, she is not held superior in our view. Is it because we are habituated to ignoring the sufferings of the subalterns? The mythical Jashoda earns legendary fame as the very name implies but her subaltern alternative fails to gain any significance and is rather ignored, neglected and abandoned. Krishna leaves Braj Bhoomi for Mathura and the general assumption is, Jashoda, the mother, is deserted by lord Krishna. However, it is not the reality. Krishna visits Jashoda on her deathbed. Her only regret was that she was not able to see his marriages. Krishna tells Jashoda that her wishes will be fulfilled in her next birth. As per the legends, Jashoda was born as Vakuladevi in her next birth and witnessed the marriage of Lord Venkateshwar. Even prior to this, there is a scene in *Bhagavad Gita* that describes the emotional union between Krishna and his foster parents. She is not abandoned as the subaltern one.

Myth Making

In "Breast Giver*"* the myth of divine motherhood is deconstructed to signify that the image of holy motherhood is the construct of a patriarchal society and its multiple agencies of domination. Viewing motherhood as something natural to women is actually nothing but exploitation. As thinks Jashodhara Bagchi: "Women's role in species reproduction has rendered 'natural' a process that is deliberately constructed in order to dominate them (Bagchi1)". Jashoda's becoming a wet nurse is criticized by RanjitGuha as the "exploitation of productive labour" (Guha 5). He writes, "the subaltern classes were subjected in varying degrees of domination […] [particularly in the sector of productive labour] [in which] workers and peasants [do not have any voice to arise] (Guha 5). Devi's deconstruction of the myth of motherhood brings into focus this very picture of exploitation. If subaltern Jashoda fails to attain the height of mythical one it is because she is a marginal character, doubly distanced from centre. But Devi deconstructs the myth not just to portray a subaltern woman's Fate/Fall /Defeat. She dies of cancer and Devi makes it clear that when a cancer patient dies, it is actually the defeat of medical science. The pivotal factor that leads to the creation of the myth of Jashoda is Lord Krishna's love and respect for his foster mother which was almost of the same degree as that of his biological mother. But in the case of Kangali's wife, no such acknowledgement is received. Devi says "the sores on her breast kept mocking her with a hundred mouths, a hundred eyes" (Devi 68). But why is it so? It is because the pain reminds Jashoda that she has not reared a hundred children but hundred ungrateful monsters. Devi deconstructs the myth of divine motherhood to recreate a new myth of a victorious woman (not mother)who though dominated and unarmed, dares to defeat the whole world with the power of her own body. Jashoda is shocked to see the same body betraying her at the end. But the author of the paper thinks that it is only to exhibit the ingratitude of the world. In every

sense, the male-dominated world is defeated by her. It cannot bear for long the ignominy of its defeat and tries to subdue her by ungratefulness and rejection, to die as a subordinate and helpless being. But the disgrace is never of Jashoda's. It is that of our patriarchal society. Jashoda is forced to withdraw and die but in death, she is victorious as it symbolically demonstrates the cruelty and ingratitude of a shameless society that itself is cancerous.

"Behind the Bodice"- New Myth of Protest

"Behind the Bodice" is the story revealing the truth that breasts do not belong to women but to the male gaze and obviously to capitalism. The "mammal projections" and "cleavage" of the Konarak chest" of Gangor, the female protagonist of this story, a migrant worker of Jharoa, attracts Upin, the photographer for its artistic beauty. Upin's photography brings to his fame and name but Gangor and her chest are "endangered" (Devi 130). Gangor's body for no fault of her own seems to become the source of all sins and she is arrested by police and is gang raped. Her breasts are seen as a commodity to satisfy Upin aesthetically and to bring to him voyeuristic pleasure. Social injustice and police brutality are unable to subdue Gangor. Ruined by the pictures, she starts selling the commodity, her body to sustain herself. When Upin meets her at the 'chullu' stand, the narrator notices: "A sharp experienced smile blooms on Gangor's lips . . . Says, the Camera–sir has been going around for me for a long time, Contractor. Today he's my client, eh sir?" (Devi 132). As Senanayak, Upin moves back. The critic observes: "She remains aware of the gaze, never loses control over her body, and never lets her body move over her existence and identity. Her resistance against the patriarchal norms costs her torture, shaming and even tearing apart of her breasts. But she is never subdued. Just like Draupadi, she stands tall. . ." (Debnath 59). Gangor's refusal to be subdued makes Upin surrender to the same system against which he tries to fight in the beginning. The capitalist society befools her and she, in turn, befools the pleasure-seeking male folks who pursue her by showing them that behind the bodice there is rape.

"Since time immemorial, the patriarchy has eroticized and regulated women's bodies in general, and their breasts in particular. Marginalized women's breasts were tagged in the not-so-distant past, they were policed, exploited, mutilated" ("Rajasekaran"). Bare-breasted Venus symbolises love and beauty. Our subaltern Gangor is punished by society for allowing her breasts to be photographed. The woman who fails to prevent the commodification of her breasts becomes in turn a commodity but her spirit can neither be purchased nor destroyed. Historically it is found that Nangeli, the Dalit woman of 19th century Travancore protests against 'mulakkaram' or breast tax by cutting off both her breasts and through Gangor, Devi creates the new myth of protest. Gangor by her bold acceptance of her indignity, pain and humiliation shows to Upin what she hides behind her bodice: "No breasts. Two dry scars, wrinkled skin, quite flat. The two raging volcanic craters spew liquid lava at Upin-gang rape…" (Devi 1995:134). Gangor stands triumphant in her protest against the patriarchal, capitalistic society. The body that is mutilated, and humiliated is used by Gangor as a medium of resistance.

Conclusion

Thus, Mahasweta Devi, apart from deconstructing the old myths, creates new myths centering on tribal women in "Breast Stories" as a way of "envisioning alternatives to social ills. . ." (Chakravarty viii). By adapting myths to contemporary situations, subverting and inverting the existing myths and at times reconstructing new myths Devi portrays the protest, resistance and subversion of dominant forces by marginalised women who refuse to accept defeat albeit brutally tortured, thereby raising awareness about the dichotomy between the centre and the margin.

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Role of Dalit Female Leaders in the Rise of Dalit Consciousness: A Study of Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life*

Prunima Sharma
Research Scholar
Department of English
Chandigarh University
Gharuan, Mohali (Punjab) India
prunimasharma1995@gmail.com

Dr. Aruna Bhat
Assistant professor
Department of English
Chandigarh University
Gharuan, Mohali (Punjab) India
aruna.e12964@cumail.in

Abstract

Dalits have been subjected to social, economic, cultural, and political exploitation since the advent of caste system. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's philosophy sprung a whole new Dalit consciousness of revolt and change against centuries old Brahmanical patriarchy. Protesting an age-old system of caste-based tyranny and confrontation of unjust, inhuman system to demand independence and liberty is at heart of Dalit consciousness. Indian literature has gone through major metamorphosis in terms of its circumstances to reflect the Indian consciousness in its true sense. But Indian Literature alienated a whole community from its chronicles before the Dalit movement. As a result, a whole new branch of literature, broadly classified as "Dalit Literature" sprouted and evolved which majorly comprised of personalized life stories of Dalit writers. With the rise of Dalit consciousness, Dalit writers started expressing themselves, narrating their harrowing experiences and spoke about the exploitation they were facing for ages through their literary work. Men, the better-positioned gender in the community, began to attempt to express the anguish over the humiliation they faced, but Dalit Women were always portrayed in the written works, as an extension or shadow of male protagonists. Even while the traumas experienced by Dalit women because of intersectional realities are distinct from those experienced by men, they were unable to appear in early literature as whole beings deserving of recognition as such. This research paper intends to study the movements led by Dalit women with reference to Urmila Pawar's The Weave of My Life *(2008). As Dalit women went through a lot more struggle to claim even their basic rights of education and dignity, as they were a victim of gender discrimination along with caste-based exploitation. Hence, it become imperative to understand the plight of Dalit women and henceforth the transformation Dalit women and their writings brought in socio-political scenario of their community. The objective is to highlight women's role in the rise of Dalit consciousness.*

Keywords: Marginalized, Education, Dalit consciousness, Dalit literature, Dalit women.

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Introduction

Caste system is an inherent deeply ingrained truth of India society and plays a crucial role in shaping the lives of millions in India, specially those who are at the bottom of the caste-ladder. The Hindu System of social stratification uses two major terms – 'Varna' and 'Jati' in whole of Brahmanical literature. The hierarchical four divisions of Hindu society namely Brahmana, Kshatriyas, vaisya and Sudras, considered Sudras as untouchable and depressed with no basic rights to human dignity. This class was worst hit by the system. This class was christened with the name 'Dalit' which means 'crushed' or 'broken' or 'supressed'. The term is a reminder of the social status of this stratum in Indian society. The notion of inequality and discrimination was so deeply entrenched in typical Hindu society uptill the rise of Ambdekarite movement which sprung forth Dalit consciousness essentially in form of protest, rebellion, anguish, and revolution against centuries old manipulative system of caste.

The literature written by Dalits was an outcome of the transformation, when nationalism, socialism, and equality, became the rhetoric during the pre-and post-independence era. Major credit for igniting and fanning this flame goes to the Ambdekarite movement which eventually led to many Dalit writers opening about their personal experiences of sorrows, agony, evil practices, slavery, degradation, and poverty. Before this time Dalits as a community were mostly underrepresented in the Indian literary world. In India, various Dalit movements were working for the benefit and well-being of Dalit society. These Dalit movements were mostly organized in response to the upper caste's dominance, particularly among Brahmins. This apparent suppression of their fundamental rights to dignity and freedom led to a distinctly hierarchical Indian society. There is ample and great literature on hand which throws light on Dalit oppression, issues, discrimination, and exploitation alongside their upliftment and awakening.

While Dalit men and women got educated and began writing in the same period, women were still much more bound by patriarchy and traditions. Caste consciousness was the main theme of both men and women Dalit writers, however, caste coupled with gender subjugation was indeed a subject of special mention. The horrific experiences of these women were of endless misery, insult, and agony. Dalit men writers did not do any special treatment with this gender-based marginalization of Dalit women. Their subordination and sufferings were seen only through the lens of caste. It was observed that literature produced by Dalit women in this era did express the women's perspective beyond the caste.

Female writers from Marathi Dalit community played a significant role in Ambdekarite movement. A prominent voice among them was Urmila Pawar who brought to light the silenced voice of Dalit women through her deep research on the subject and her narratives in form of autobiography. She drew attention of literary community towards the bare absence of Dalit women's representation at the literary podium and literature's failure to

recognize their role and participation. She was of the first few Dalit women writers, who broke away the predominant male identity of Dalit movement, literature, and history.

This paper primarily intends to view Dalit literature and Dalit consciousness through the perspective of prominent Dalit women writers with special mention of Urmila Pawar's autobiography *The Weave of My Life.* Being a Dalit woman author, her work primarily reflects Ambedkarite ideas on Dalit consciousness in contrast to other Ambedkarite principles. She brings to light the caste persecution of Mahar community women through this text. The narrative is an authentic, fully detailed chronicle of the Konkan civilization exhibiting the intricacies of intersectional gender and caste-based biases.

Dalit Consciousness and Dalit Literature

Dalit consciousness is a state of awareness for any Dalit where he or she is cognizant of the oppression and injustice subjugated onto him/her through the age-old caste system. It is essentially the protest and an outcry for socio-political dignity, freedom, and equality. Prominent Dalit Writer Om Prakash Valmiki states that "Dalit consciousness" fuels the unique power and drive behind the Dalit Literature. The litmus test for recognition of any literary enterprise as Dalit literature lies in the fact that its primary rhetoric should be the propagation of Dalit consciousness. Literary emergence of Dalit Literature dates to 1960s. This literature was primarily focussed on bringing the Dalit voices to centre stage and demand for equality and liberty for Dalits. Dalit literature has an overtone of material, social and political aspects rather than any metaphysical entertainment value. It can essentially be called as a literature of reality and reform.

Role of Dalit Women in the Rise of Dalit Consciousness

The insurrection of 1857 was the first significant uprising of women and against British rule. It was very important in shaping India's modern mindset. The new school system, newspaper, and social movement that emerged after the uprising of 1857 hastened the process of increasing women's visibility in public spaces. Despite some restrictions, social movements gave some women the opportunity to carve out a space for themselves and advance the independence and liberty of women. Indian Dalit women are a unique socio-political sect owing to their intersectional identity entrenched in exploitation as 'Dalits' and as 'women'. The interactions of these two identities reinforce each other and this doubly marginalized status of Dalit women makes it all the way more important to represent their story and cause in a proper light. Savitribai Phule was one of the pioneers of raising the voice of Dalit women through her poems and stories along with her husband Jyoti Rao Phule. She carried out a mammoth task of bringing the social and educational movement of 'Shudra' and 'Ati-Shudra' women to forefront. As the writer said, "In the post-Ambedkar period, Dalit women used literature as a weapon in feminist writing that include the genres such as poetry, short story, essay, novel, and autobiography" (Mandavkar 44).

The Dalit women's voices were buried beneath the mountains of patriarchal and hierarchical intersections in Indian society because of clubbing all the women's voices

indiscriminately. It was impossible to address the Dalit women's triple discrimination against caste, class, and gender by including their voices among all other women's voices. Investigating Dalit women's involvement in various campaigns for their rights also highlights the voices of these women. As Bhushan Sharma in his paper "Narratives of Dalit Women and 'the Outsider Within': Toward a Literary Practice of Dalit Feminist Standpoint" explains:

> The marginal social location of Dalits women makes them conscious of patterns of social structures that are not decipherable to sociological insiders. Learning from their *"outsider within"* status has helped Dalit women to understand that the advantaged groups use ideologies to confine them to the borderline, thus limiting their access to societal resources and institutions to control, define, and relegate them. As reality can only be known if it is represented, Dalit women penned their life narratives—social epiphanies—that then drove women impregnated with Dalit consciousness. (Sharma 27)

Originally Dalit women's life narrations were a form of protest and activism against the gender and caste pyramid. Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of my Life* is a significant Dalit woman autobiography which familiarizes us with intersectional nature of caste and gender-based atrocities. A long journey has been covered by Dalit women writers over the last four decades. The creative and political transformation of Dalit women writers can be attributed to evolution of Dalit consciousness. The female Dalit writers, right from the first Dalit woman Baby Kamble who wrote her autobiography to new age Dalit women writers like Shilpa Kamble, Pradnya Pawar, Chaya Koregaonkar, have undergone massive progression in their reconstruction and interpretation of their gendered realities amalgamated with caste-based existence. The expression of Dalit feminism has covered many milestones and has undergone different phases of social reality.

Rise of Dalit Consciousness as an Outcome of Social Revolution – Excerpts from *The Weave of My Life*

Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life* supports the social philosophy of revolution given by Ambedkar when the narrative is assessed from an Ambedkarite social perspective. The narrative's constant reflection of self-consciousness is what distinguishes it as a perfect example of Ambdekarite thought of Dalit consciousness. To make changes, one needs to be self-aware. The narrative of Urmila Pawar is rife with literary and socio-cultural developments. Pawar traces her lineage to her great-grandfather, who rebelled against the humiliation inflicted by members of the upper caste. The uprising led by her grandfather occurred because of Phule's Satyashodhak Movement in 1873. She wrote: "Hari felt it was humiliating to have the rituals conducted from a distance. It must have been the influence of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule's Satyashodhak movement in 1873, so during one of his visits to the village, Hari called a meeting of the villagers. They decided that in the future they would perform all the rituals themselves" (13). The awareness of humiliation and the response against the practice of rituals demonstrate the beginning of Dalit upliftment and the emergence of their consciousness. Due to Phule's Satyashodhak movement, individuals

started to become more conscious of their actions and challenged the unfair, traditional caste system and its practices. Pawar's father was a contemporary man in every manner because he brought the completion of his daughter's education and independence to execution at a time when Mahar people were powerless and lacking in self-worth. They had to perform menial tasks in the village because they were untouchables. Raj Kumar accurately describes the state of these people in his book *Dalit Literature and Criticism* (2019). He documents "Apart from being untouchable, they were also unseeable, unperceivable, and unheard by most castes. They were considered as the lowest of the low and treated worse than animals by Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Parasis, and other religious communities" (Kumar 1).

Urmila Pawar's Dalit-hood, or caste of Mahars, considered as one of the lowest in the Hindu varna system, and the problems of gender, or being born a woman in the patriarchal Indian society, are strongly related to the problem of poverty. She must contend with these opposing forces throughout her life in order to assert her identity and find fulfilment. Like most of her community, the narrator experiences economic incapacity. They lack sufficient food, clothing, a suitable place to live, and other creature comforts because of their poverty. In terms of her gender and caste, Urmila Pawar recounts the twofold oppression or double marginalisation she has experienced, as well as the resulting limitations and disadvantages in life. In terms of gender, society, and economics, she had to suffer:

> We belonged to the Mahad-Rajaput belt, which forms the central region of the Konkan, and, compared to the north-south belt, this region is quite backward. I was born in a backward caste in a backward region, that too a girl! Since Father died when we were quite young, Aaye had to be very thrifty to make ends meet. Basically, she was a born miser, really! There is a saying in Marathi: imagine a monkey drinking wine, getting intoxicated, getting bitten by a scorpion, and then a ghost casting its spell on him. The point is people's traits intensify and eventually cause havoc in their lives. Her case was similar. Therefore, food was always scarce in our house. (79)

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar has written in his editorial that the "Indian caste system is like a skyscraper lacking stairs connecting the various levels and floors. Once born on a particular floor, you will live and die on the same floor. There is no mobility between the different levels" (Navaria 175). To make them aware of themselves he gave the untouchables in the villages important advice to move out "Leave the village, the village will never help your progress. Go to the city!", This expresses Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's modernist viewpoint to accept the new ways. The same was done by Urmila Pawar's husband Harishchandra. After being humiliated at Talathi's residence, he never went back to his village. These instances clearly show how Dalits were influenced by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and his thoughts on self-consciousness. The untouchables were so drawn to Ambedkar's modernist viewpoint that they followed him no matter what came of their choices. "Babasaheb appealed to the people to give up their traditional caste-specific duties of Maharaki, and that is what people did" (Pawar 159). After the upliftment of their consciousness and realization of self-worth, Dalits lives underwent a radical change because of his teachings. The story offers several examples of social transformation that are indicative of a modernist mindset. This demonstrates how quickly they both accepted the new social changes brought about by discarding the traditional ties.

The underprivileged population were inspired by Ambdekarite thoughts to guide

them and help them understand their place in society. The oppressed were successfully redefined by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar because of which they became aware of their status and power. However, to maintain the position, it was necessary to fulfil obligations to disseminate ideas and raise awareness among the populace. The narrator recognized the importance of spreading Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's philosophy to educate the oppressed population about their rights and responsibilities which could have led to the rise of Dalit consciousness. Pawar saw the significance of the programs and began attending seminars and gatherings of Dalit organizations. Through these seminars, they could provide emerging writers from the Dalit community with a platform and inspire them. Additionally, they raised Dalit awareness so that they can enlighten society and shape it into the society that is desired.

Dr. B. R Ambedkar gave education the highest priority in his philosophy because, in his view, it is a tool through which he can uplift Dalit consciousness which in turn inspires Dalits for living a meaningful life. One such family that recognized the value of education was the Pawar family. Education was one of the numerous strands of Ambedkarite viewpoint that run through her story. She said, "My father, who was a teacher, had built a small little hut-like house on the road to the bazaar, in Ratnagiri proper, especially for his children's education. So, we siblings lived in the town." (Pawar 3). This claim emphasizes how her father's influence on schooling may be seen in the fact that he constructed a home for his kids. Her grandfather, who educated her father, was influenced by the educational ideas of Ambedkarite philosophers. She wrote, recalling her earlier experiences, "My grandfather, Chimaji, had a great wish to educate his son, my father." (15) Her father maintained the same pattern of educating his kids. He went on to become a teacher and left the family with a very strict impression. He instructed his wife to educate his children before he passed away. She said, alluding to her father's statement, "Educate the children." (30). This declaration demonstrates her father's dedication to educating his kids by demonstrating that, even as he lay dying, he thought about his kid's future in education. She continued, "He was the one who insisted on us getting educated, Let the girls go to school. They had to stand on their own feet, be independent. They must also learn to ride bicycles" (33). For today's generation, her father's ideas about educating his daughters and helping them succeed are perfect and inspiring. It was the idea to permit the lamp of knowledge to burn continuously. Similarly, Pawar has successfully influenced society using a variety of tools, including literature, education, speeches, movements, philosophies, etc. Every educated member of the community, like Pawar, believed that education was the key to creating the ideal society. Her desire for knowledge is shown in her assessment following her injury, which read: "Frankly speaking, I had a great desire for further education." Further, she said, "But I still wanted to do an M.A. Education is that nectar which once tasted makes you feel thirstier still!" (240).

Pawar discovered that she had a new perspective on women after joining the women's organization. As a woman, she overcame her fear. She began delivering remarks in front of the public on the birthdays of Jyoti Rao Phule, and Ambedkar, and at literary conferences. She took part in "Women's Organization-Maitrini," where she acquired skills for resolving women's issues. Later, she founded the "Samwadini Dalit Stree Sahitya Manch," where she and her colleagues carried out their ambitious objectives, including

finding women poets and authors and bringing them together to support one another, organize public oral histories, organize "Women's Sahitya Sammelans," and so on. Her efforts had no bounds. She dealt with various issues both inside and outside of her family while working in the movement at the grassroots level. The story is thus the authentic chronicle of Ambedkarite thought which are very strongly reflected in it. She completed her studies while taking care of her family and volunteering, founded Dalit women's organizations, joined numerous movements and organizations, wrote poetry, and published her historical book, which helped to establish her as an inspiration for the following generation. Education thus became the Dalit community's nectar which plays a crucial part in the development of their consciousness.

Conclusion

Dalit literature makes readers aware of caste-based oppression and untouchability in India. The analysis and writing of Dalit literature particularly the autobiographies reflect the search for self-identity. These writings are real authentic testimonies of their very own communities. Moreover, the restrictions and barriers that Dalit women's voices face in today's democratic India display a history of marginalization and silence. Due to the range of experiences Dalit women have, it is crucial to identify the long-term historical structures and issues that surround Dalit women's concerns and claims. This can be done by taking part in historical movements, engaging in political activism, and producing literary works. Now, Dalit literature is no longer solely about the struggles of Dalits however additionally it indicates how Dalits used education, knowledge, writing, and self-consciousness to awaken themselves.

Urmila Pawar's stories in *The Weave of My Life* provide a ray of hope that strong-willed human beings can overcome their conditions and can declare their freedom in this democratic India. This paper discussed all about Dalit Consciousness and the ideal society that Ambedkar envisioned. Dalit's fight for education, their sorrows and sufferings in various literary genres, their defiance of conventional wisdom in favour of progressive action, and their sincere efforts to educate the public all demonstrate Ambedkarite perspectives that adhere to the principles of Dalit consciousness, that were reflected in the above-discussed narrative.

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Bruised Dalit Feminist Fiction and the Problematics of Translation in English

Ashaq Hussain Parray
Research Scholar
Department of English
Chandigarh University
Gharuan, Mohali (Punjab) India
ashaq533@gmail.com

Dr. Tanu Gupta
Professor
Department of English
Chandigarh University
Gharuan, Mohali (Punjab) India
tanu.e9349@cumail.in

Abstract

Dalit feminist theorists and fiction writers earnestly try their best to challenge the mainstream women's movement in India, for mainstream Indian feminist theory/fiction has bypassed the caste system and Dalit patriarchy altogether in its agenda. In an age of global capitalism, neo-imperialism, and pseudo-postmodernism, Dalit feminism seriously tries to confront the oppressive socio-economic structures in India, and contest them in a unique and befitting way. Translators of Dalit feminist fiction writers, no doubt, try to expose how caste, gender, class, and Dalit patriarchy interact and oppress Dalit women in India. This paper attempts to scrutinize how problematic is the act of translation on part of the translators' while trying to represent the bruised Dalit feminist consciousness, particularly in a foreign language like English. The paper further aims to establish that even those who claim to represent the subaltern Dalit women are not able to reflect the true realities of the oppression and marginalization of Dalit women.
Key Words: Caste Politics, Dalit Patriarchy, Translation Politics, Iterability, Objectivity

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Introduction

The caste system divides Indian society into four main categories - Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and the Shudras. At the lowest rung in the caste ladder, Dalit women in Indian society have been traditionally discriminated and barred from attaining their just human rights. Dalit Women not only suffer from caste and gender discrimination, but also economic

dispossession. They have been sexually abused and exploited due to low caste and weak economic status. Dalit feminist fiction writers, no doubt, try their best to expose the oppressive structures of dalit patriarchy, caste, and gender in the caste-ridden Indian urban and rural context. Dalit feminist theorists and fiction writers try to subvert the philosophies that erroneously propagate the idea that women in India share the same types of repressions and subjugations. The chief aim of Dalit feminists is to highlight the perspectives of Dalit women whose voices have often been silenced, ignored, and misrepresented. Actually women's oppression, discrimination, and dalit patriarchal structures are established in manifold ways.The idea of 'dalit patriarchy' was introduced by Gopal Guru in his essay 'Dalit Women Talk Differently' purposefully to critique unjust dalit patriarchal thinking. He opines:

> Besides th[e] external factors, ther are certain internal factors that have prompted dalit women to organise separately vis-a-vis dalit men. In the post-Ambedkar period, dalit leaders have always subordinated, and at times suppressed, an independent political expression of dalit women . . . Dalit women rightly question why they are not considered for the top positions in dalit literary conferences and institutions. This dissent brings three things to the fore: (1) It is not only caste and class identity but also one's gender positioning that decides the validity of an event; (2) Dalit men are reproducing the same mechanisms against their women which their high caste adversaries had used to dominate them; (3) The experience of dalit women shows that local resistance within dalits is important. The whole situation compels us to defend the claim that dalit women talk differently. (Guru, 1995, 2549)

Urmila Pawar, a famous Dalit writer, opines that "Dalit women's issues did not have any place on the agenda of the Dalit movement and the Women's movement. Even today things have not changed" (Pawar 260).

Discussion

Due to the emergence of a significant number of translators and growing interest in its publication the world over, Dalit literature is flourishing day by day. Ravi Kumar, a famous Dalit critic opines that "while the spurt in translations ensures that Dalit voices do become accessible and casteism is exposed, it is important also to remember that there is a politics of selection at work in terms of what is translated and by whom" (qtd. in Rege 8).Translation indeed is a complex process involving various dynamics. Is it the original writer who is actually getting translated and recognized globally, or the translator who decides on her/his own to select and then translate, or the publisher who wants to earn bucks out of this whole translation process? Translation can be sense to sense translation, machine translation, cultural translation. However, no method can realize the intensity of the Dalit cultural vocabulary that represents oppressive dalit experiences. Dalit women's fiction translators' privileged positionality often becomes a crucial factor in misrecognising caste oppression.

Since the very act of translation is a sort of transgression and iterability, how do we then agree with the accuracy of the translator, who translates a local dialect into a foreign language, for example English? The linguistic boundaries of languages are different. In this sense, existing discourses of interpretation determine not only what can be said and understood, but contend the nature of subjectivity of the translator and the foreign semantic structure of the target and source language itself. The translator challenges and interrogates the texts s/he chooses as per his own desires and objectives, but it must also be acknowledged that he is now at a vantage point from where he appropriates the existing discourses pervading in the text. Pandit in her essay opines:

> It is possible that the translator while translating a text from his/her own language is sometimes rudely awakened out of his/her self-proclaimed familiarity with the terrain in unexpected ways in the act of negotiating the roadmap. S/he has to be aware of the obvious routes and the escape routes; the main roads and the hidden paths and the difficulties involved or the traps they set in for the translator. At least that is what I have discovered while translating literature from Marathi into English. (147-148)

Lack of Translators' Inclusive Consciousness

Since the translator doesn't necessarily have an inclusive consciousness, s/he can't objectively correlate the actual traumatic experiences that an oppressed subject experiences. For instance, famous Dalit feminist writer Urmila Pawar's autobiography *Aaydaan*, written in Marathi, has been translated into English and titled as *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs* by Maya Pandit. Pandit (2015) comments about the text "*The Weave* portrays the conditions of a subhuman existence of an entire community, shamelessly exploited by the upper castes, reduced to a status of beasts of burden, extremely marginalized" (xvi). The caste system pervades and crushes Dalit women in every aspect of life. For instance, Kamble in *The Prison We Broke* writes about Dalit women:

> They were not allowed to use the regular road that was used by the higher castes. When somebody from these castes walked from the opposite direction, the Mahars had toleave the road, descend into the shrubbery and walk through the thorny bushes on the roadside. They had to cover themselves fully if they saw any man from the higher castes coming down the road, and when he came close, they had to say, 'The humble Mahar women fall at your feet.' This was like a chant, Grandmother which they had to repeat innumerable times, even to a small child if it belonged to a higher caste. (52)

While glossing over the translated text, it comes to the surface that the translator has tried her best to represent a realistic picture of Dalit women's sufferings, but it is laden with the problems that emerge in the process of translation. For instance, Pandit has translated: "Women hunted for crawfish or crabs in the rocks by pushing their hands inside. They got drenched in the waves dashing against the rocks. Their hands and feet would be cut by the sharp edges of the rocks, and the salty seawater stung the wound" (44). Though the translator

has tried her best to capture the pathetic conditions of Dalit women in beautiful imagery, but still the foreign reader who is not acquainted with the Indian caste system, may fail to develop any empathy with the women represented in the translated text.

Jeopardizing Ethnic and Traumatic Euphoria in the Translation Process

A Dalit writer like other writer uses a set of words from his/her dialect such that at each time there is a unique set of words that can suit his/her purpose. However, the translator is also a language creator. He has his/her own ideological footings. The target language s/he chooses possess limited sets of choices and makes the very act of translation quite a daunting task. For a translator to capture the bruised contours of traumatic experiences, there will always lie a chasm between his location and the real site of the oppressed body. Singh comments:

> Translating trauma into words has always unearthed the worst-kept secrets of the official narratives of any nation, amply manifested in the survivors of racism, sexism and casteism. For the translator translating may also be seen as experiencing the trauma surrogately and bringing it to life in another language. Testimonios unequivocally make certain claims on the readers. They aim at triggering a conversation, a public debate and a participatory response from the readers. One can hence, assume that the translator, being first and foremost a reader, must engage at a visceral level with the narrative of pain and oppression. (Singh 1)

The very act of translation jeopardizes the essence of ethnic euphoria that the original text enmeshes. For instance, in *Aaydaan,* there is a continuous shift from a simple narrative style to a more advanced syntactic structure in the later part of the novel, which can't be delineated in a foreign language like English, which belongs to a different cultural setting. Given the differences in grammatical structures, the shift of structures is inevitable, therefore, the original meaning and sense transfer becomes evasive. Sharmila Rege opines:

> Dalit writing is different as it talks about suffering which is distinctively different, like the suffering that comes across to us in the Spanish testimonies. This is not merely to celebrate the 'difference' of the Dalit communities, but to explicate the factors that bring this 'difference' into existence, in the form of a life based upon indignities and humiliation, in order to challenge and change it...This signifies that the role of the translator is far more transgressive than is envisaged by many translation theorists. . .The testimonies produced in a consciously defined modern sense of what it meant to be a dalit woman, challenge the hegemony of brahminical linguistic practices. One has to guard therefore against stereotypical sanskritisation in translation often in the name of accessibility to the 'common reader' the struggle is also to retain as much as possible of the regional and caste specific overtones without rendering dalit cultures as exotic sites. (qtd. in Pandit 153)

Pawar with a tongue-in-cheek attitude portrays her bridal night moments

> My jaau Mai had turned the middle room into our bridal chamber. My husband's face

> glowed but I felt a little embarrassed. However, I entered the room as if it was nothing special. My husband followed behind. The moment he came in he bolted the door. All the people were awake outside. The wooden door had big crevices. I blew the light out in spite of my husband's protest. Light had no place in the embrace. (186)

The cultural connotations of shyness may not be encapsulated by foreign readers who have a different cultural tuning. Similarly, Baby Kamble's memoir *JeenaAmucha,* translated by Maya Pandit as *The Prisons We Broke,* without any reticence describes the wedding's songs. For instance:

> Here comes the rukhwat, come and watch,
> Our Inibai's got an itch in her crotch.
> Give her a couch, she's on heat…
> Get up, Iwan, take off her clothes,
> Show her the house, give her a bath. (Kamble 91)

For a translator, even if s/he belongs to the same gender, class, and caste, it is inconceivable to translate and retain the very wit, humor, sarcasm, and poetic cadence of the original author. For instance, Kamble tries to capture the mythical belief system of the Dalit villagers as:

> That's how the screaming epidemic spread, creating a huge commotion all over. Meanwhile, a potraja started beating rhythmically on his dimdi! That would excite the women all the more. They would just sprint towards the chawdi like excited she—buffaloes, completely unaware of what they were wearing or the people around. They would dance around the potraja screaming all the while on the top of their voices. These possessed women were called goddesses or mothers. When they started dancing, the potraja too slipped into his element […]. The potraja would get tired, but the women? No way! (Kamble 22)

Finally, as Sen (2013) opines that: "this ritual takes a kind of feminist turn, as the women, in the guise of the goddess, vent their grievances, make their demands, and express their wishes until the men literally fall at their feet begging for forgiveness and assuring them that they will fulfil their desires" (43). For a translator to represent these entire cultural rituals and belief systems in English is quite challenging. The words like potraja (a fast vanishing tribe that hails from the Western state of Maharashtra/worshippers of a goddess that is referred to as Kadak Lakshmi), dimdi (a particular stringed folk musical instrument made of wood, leather, and metal, and chawdi (the space of discussion and debate) might still be haunting the foreign readers who are not aware about the diverse Indian cultural systems.

Cultural knowledge creation has been basically exploitative in nature; it encourages social inequality. Pawar exemplifies the enactment of ancient and unfair enforcement of caste panchayats, and quotes the example of a widow who was found to be pregnant:

> The whole village knew who the man was. But only she was given the verdict. She was made to lean forward, and women kicked her from behind till the child was aborted. The

villagers felt this was a valiant act of bravery. They felt proud that they had protected the village's honor. If a woman was suspected to have erred, she was brought before the Panchayat for justice and punishment. She was publically judged and her other relatives would beat her up as well. (Pawar 156)

In such a situation, the translators' role becomes quite crucial to let the circulation of the knowledge/experiences in marginalised languages reach global audience. Despite the lacunas the English translations of Dalit writings, it still has got some ability to alleviate the Dalit writers' positionality. Kothari observes "as far as the English language is concerned, its ideological potential to "translate" the dalit life from fatalism to an identity of rights outweighs considerations of its distance from Indian reality (67).

Lack of True Solidarity between the Original Writer and the Translator

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in *The Politics of Translation*, focuses on the positionality of the original writer, the linguistic incompetence of a decoder, and the multiple potentialities that the source text can offer to the translator, and the iterability of target language to represent all these dynamics. In simple terms, a translator can't capture the personal or the political dimension, and the hegemonic discursive cultural apparatuses subtly working underneath the source text under translation accurately, for his/her personal biases, political orientation, and other interests don't let the communication of absolute information to transcend and transpire as effectively as it should be. Spivak endorses the possibility that the translator while translating can fulfil her own desires. She comments that:

> The task of the feminist translator is to consider language as a clue to the workings of gendered agency. The writer is written by her language, of course. But the writing of the writer writes agency in a way that might be different from that of the British woman/citizen with the history of British feminism, focused on the task of freeing herself from Britain's imperial past, its often racist present, as well as its "made in Britain" history of male domination. (312-313)

She questions the notion of solidarity among women writer/translator, for "the task of the translator is to surrender herself to the linguistic rhetoricity of the original text . . . and the translator must be able to discriminate on the terrain of the original", to certify a proper translation exercise, which is a major stride to ally with a "subaltern other" (Spivak 320). In simple terms, a translator should be able to comprehend the political ethos, and the oppressive cultural structures latent in the original document in question, understand his/her own subjective liaison with the document, and be willing to set aside, if not totally abandon his/her situational opportunity, for transfer of knowledge to happen through the act of translation.

Implausibility to Represent Reality Objectively in the Translation Process

Owing to varied linguistic and psychological patterns, translation becomes a traumatic experience even for the translator, whether s/he is a native or non-native subject. The translator's first desire is to conceive and impregnate herself with the pattern of emotions embedded in the original linguistic structure, but it is fraught with ambivalence owing to his/her own peculiar psychological make-up and choice of linguistic codification that s/he has to choose, besides the influence of the political structures of the time. Translation critics deliberate upon the problematics of what precisely is churning in the "black box" of the translators' minds as they create a new, more or less matching text in another language (Holmes, 1988, 72). Owing to the arbitrary nature of languages itself, the translator might be undergoing a lot of labour pain to deliver suitable words, phrases, and syntactic structure while translating the source text into a foreign syntax. The translator's ultimate selection of words and structures is "inevitably influenced by multiple factors in society as a conglomerate of various socio-cultural systems, such as patronage, ideology and poetics" (Lefevere 92). Researchers are involved in exploring the chaotic internal thinking patterns of the translator who has to deal with varied manuscripts under the effect of countless cultural dynamics. A. K. Ramanujan, a famous Indian poet and translator opines that: "a translator is 'an artist on oath'. He has a double allegiance, indeed, several double allegiances. All too familiar with the rigors and pleasures of reading a text and those of making another; caught between the need to express himself and the need to represent another; moving between the two halves of one brain, he has to use both to get close to 'the originals'(qtd. in Prasad 37).

Closing on to the core issue of caste and class, how can we exonerate the privileged translator from his/her social and cultural prejudice which subconsciously enters the very process of translation? No amount of soul-searching can probably substitute the shame of being and living the life of a Dalit woman. The 'outsider-within' position of Dalit women translators endorses a tangible location of psychological conflict (Sen 43).These translators demonstrate the fact that countless unjust social rituals escape the translator's imagination. This study may also benefit other marginalized groups by expanding trust in their creative potential for their narratives and cultural biographies to reach a global audience. One can hence assume that the translator, being first and foremost a reader, must engage at an intuitive level with the pain and oppression of the original author. However, it is inconceivable, problematic, and incomprehensible that even the original author fails to portray the reality. How can a translator represent the bruised consciousness/identity of any marginalized community objectively? If bruised Dalit feminist consciousness could have been translated into a public, official, and ethical discourse earnestly, then there wouldn't have been this problem in circulation even in the 21st century. Since ignorant masses still believe in an oppressive caste system, they deceive themselves by believing in unjust systems and consider these systems to be infallible. This mythical belief of the masses facilitated oppressive cultural forces to garner immense power to marginalize and crush the powerless

section of society.

Conclusion

In the contemporary times of ours in which knowledge circulation is still under the surveillance of political machinery that benefits from the maintenance of social inequality at various levels, further barring of possible knowledge production of a linguistic code that can disrupt the power structures, can be detrimental for the future generations, and the exploitative cultural systems will continue to bruise the consciousness of the oppressed class. Baby Kambly, Bama, and Urmila Pawar are now part of the English Dalit canon, but what about those countless Dalit women who don't have access to basic education even in local dialects, forget about English. As far as representations, translations, or transcreations are concerned, these can never be a substitute for real oppressed feminist consciousness throughout the world, for patriarchal, publishing, political, and pseudo-religious machinery continuously evolve new mechanisms of female oppression, rendering even Dalit feminism hapless and emasculated. The true emancipation of women is a continuing struggle that has to carry on until the real emancipation of the lesser privileged women is also achieved. It is very crucial to understand that even those who claim to represent the subaltern Third World Dalit women are not necessarily able to reflect the true realities of the oppression and marginalization of Dalit women. Mutual interests, not urgencies forced by those with superior privilege than others, are crucial and can provide a foundation for true solidarity and common purpose.

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Journeying through India with a White (Wo)man's Burden: A Study of Dervla Murphy's *On a Shoestring to Coorg*

Dr. Neelam Yadav
Assistant Professor
Department of English
Delhi College of Arts and Commerce
University of Delhi
neelamyadav.dcac@gmail.com

Abstract

When Derval Murphy traversed across India on her bicycle in 1963, she went back to Ireland with prejudiced perception towards India and Indians. Around 10 years later (accompanied by her 5 years old daughter, Rachel), her journeys across the inland to the remote and rugged highlands of southern India, witnessed Murphy's apparent assimilation in the exotic south Indian culture and tradition. But a close reading of the text also observed Dervla Murphy, an Irish traveller, who authored more than 25 travelogues based on her journeys to various remote countries, mostly the colonized like India, Pakistan, Madagascar and many African countries, as a white, condescending traveller, who "travel in the awareness of belonging to a Western culture, a European culture" and hence, becomes an imperial traveller. It is in this context of being an 'other' in India, this paper will attempt to find answer to the question whether like many western travellers to exotic distant land Murphy in her On a Shoestring to Coorg*, too, travelled with "the White (Wo)man's Burden" or rather her interjections on Indians and many Indian believes were merely born out of her 'otherness' in relation to the travelled country, here, South India.*
Keywords: Feminist Discourse, Colonial Discourse, Traveller, India, Narratorial Position, Outsider

Introduction

> Take up the White Man's burden -
> Send forth the best ye breed -
> Go bind your sons to exile
> To serve your captives' need; (Kipling 321)

Above lines, from Rudyard Kipling's poem "The White Man's Burden" on American-Philippines war, were meant to send an implicit message to the world that western cultures are morally and culturally superior to non-Western cultures, hence, have right to teach and reform the non-whites, non-western population according to Western traditions and standards. The title of my paper is the riff-off of the above mentioned phrase, 'White Man's Burden', analysed here in context of *On the Shoestring to Coorg* (1976), a travelogue based on Dervla Murphy's travel to India in 1973.

Dervla Murphy, an Irish travel legend, died on 22 May 2022 at the age of 90, was a self-acknowledged-intrepid traveller who authored more than 25 books based on her journeys to the far and distant lands like India, Pakistan, Tibet, Afghanistan, Iran, Peru, Africa, Siberia, Cuba, Ethiopia, Romania and many more, as a solitary traveller and sometimes accompanied by her daughter, Rachel. The subsequent books based on travels are

as endearing and exciting as her journeys. Some of the catchy titles of the books are *Full Tilt: From Ireland to India on a Bicycle Back (1965), Tibetan Foothold* (1966), *Where the Indus is Young*? (1977), *Eight Feet in the Andes* (1983), *Muddling through in Madagascar (1985)*, *Tales from Two Cities* (1987), etc. Though much of her life as a writer is accessible to her readers in the interviews published in various magazines and journals, it is her autobiography, *Wheels within Wheels* (1979), which primarily focussed on her life before she became a hardcore traveller and a travel writer.

In August 1973, Murphy had decided to set on a 'non-European journey' (Murphy 11) to give her five-year old daughter an experience of 'travelling rough' (Murphy 11) on one hand, and to exert her authority as "a westerner, a European traveller" (Murphy 11) on the other. After many conflicting discussions, and escaping plenty of persuasions and temptations offered by friends and relatives abroad, Murphy decided to go back to India, the country she was repulsive of during her previous travel in 1963, "far from having fallen in love with India during previous visits I had been repelled by some aspects of Hindu life, irritated by others, uneasily baffled by most and consciously attracted by very few", confessed Murphy in the introduction of the travelogue (Murphy 12). Her debut travelogue, *Full Tilt: From Ireland to India on a Bicycle Back* (1965), was based on her experiences of travelling for six months on a bicycle, named 'Roz', across Europe and through Persia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and finally to India. After a decade of her first travel to the country, Murphy was quite apprehensive to travel to India again, which, she confesses was a dual challenge, "Apart from the subtle, impersonal challenge of India itself, there would be the personal challenge posed by trying to achieve a successful fusion of two roles: mother and traveller" (Murphy 13). These are not the only apparent challenges she would come across on her 'return journey' to India. Her status in India as a white European, an outsider, and a woman traveller will also have had an impact on her narratorial positions with respect to two discourses – colonial, and feminine. In the course of her journeying across India, we will inquire how these narratorial positions as a female traveller in a (post)colonial country keep crossing and challenging each other.

Throughout her life, as a traveller and a travel writer, Murphy has presented herself as a powerful, indomitable individual, who has subverted all norms of travel and travel writing, and subdued and contradicted Paul Fussell's statement that, "women are not sufficiently concerned either with travel or with writing itself" (Fussell 197). My objective in this paper is not to establish Murphy as a traveller who challenged the male dominance in travel and travel writing, but to interrogate her position as an authoritative colonial voice and a woman traveller in a country which was once under the British rule. Being from a European country, (Ireland was a British Colony till its declaration of independence in 1919), Murphy has an advantage of being a representative of imperial voice. But, on the other hand, being a woman she was an under-privileged gender to establish her authority like her male counterpart. It is with reference to Dervla Murphy as a European female traveller, this paper aim to study Murphy's Indian travelogue, *On the Shoestring to Coorg,* in this dual context of colonial and feminist discourse (theories) and will also try to seek answer to the posit questions - While travelling across India was Murphy carrying her own cultural baggage as a superior race to analyse people she meets, places she visits and country she explores? And also, at the same time, did she manage to elude the imperialist tone/voice that so often considered as a characteristic of male travel writing and find her own identity of being an independent traveller, separating herself from any form of race, class and gender?

On a Shoestring to Coorg, subtitled, *An Experience of South India* is based on Dervla

Murphy's travels, along with her five-year old daughter, Rachel, across the Indian western coastline, covering many famous cities and towns like, Mumbai (then Bombay), Panji (including many beaches of Goa); then the journey down the Malabar coast, from Kumta to Bhatkal to Udipi to Manglore, Mercara, Mysore, Kushalnagar and Kudige. They also traversed across the famous cities of Kerala like, Cochin, Trivandrum, Cape Comorin, Madurai and were "overwhelmed by the sheer abundance – the boundless exuberance – of Kerala's fertility" (Murphy109). Though at most of the places their stay was as short as few hours, it was Coorg, the little known province between the Malabar Coast and the Carnatic that they "both fell in love" (Murphy 14) and decided to stay for two long months.

Dervla Murphy's Colonial Discourse

India has been subjected to the western gaze for more than four centuries and also has become a subject of many travellers'/explorers' exotic and orient travels. From Said's theory of orientalism to Bhabha's concept of national identity, much has been written and problematized when it comes to the process by which the West has orientalized the orient. But it was Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), and Sara Mills *Discourses of Difference* (2002) which has brought the idea of '(fe)male gaze' (Pratt 82) and 'imperialist's voice' (Mills 3) respectively to the travel theories in relation to women travellers and travel writers. While Mills *Discourses of Difference*, "the first book to set women travellers within the colonial context" (Mills 3), resurrected readers interest in travel and travel writing in the contemporary literary world by focusing on the discourses of colonialism and femininity, it is Pratt's seminal work which critically analyses the genre in context of colonial discourse. Dúnlaith Bird, in her article, "Travel Writing and Gender" moves a step ahead and list the the difficulties a female traveller contest while travelling as an outsider, and also brought to readers notice that race, nationality, class, location, historical circumstance, and power are a few determinants which give meaning and perspective to women travel writings (Bird 115). She also contends that the construction of authority is primal to colonial travel writing and is more complex in case of women travellers (Bird 123). Since women have only two choices at their disposal: either follow the masculine narrative approach of authority or be a submissive gender, it becomes difficult to underpin any one, when two are at contesting position. As Dervla Murphy's position in India is dual and paradoxical, it raised the challenge to approach her travelogue(s) from these two perspectives only. Her narratorial position vacillates between an outsider and a European-Westerner in India. A 'European/Westerner' is always going to be an outsider in India, but an 'outsider' is not necessary be someone European or a Westerner. Being an outsider in a country depends majorly on the perspective with which one travels across the land. Even a native of the place could be labelled as an outsider, depending on the outlook with which he/she has travelled. For example, an Indian origin writer, V.S. Naipaul (17 August 1932-11 August 2018) travelled across India for almost 30 intermittent years, yet labelled as an 'outsider in India' by critics like Purabi Pawar, Sudha Rai, Mustafa Fawzia and etc. Dervla Murphy in 1964 travelled to India, and like Naipaul sees nothing, but squalor and filth all around and corrupt and mean Indians. This was one of the reasons that she was reluctant to revisit the country. Her early displeasure of choosing India for a 'non-European' travel establish her tone of later resentment:

> Why, then, my compulsion to go back? I had no quasi-mystical ambition to improve my soul by contact with Hindu spirituality, nor had I forgotten the grim details of

> everyday Indian life – the dehumanising poverty, the often deliberately maimed beggars, the prevaricating petty officials, the heat, the flies, the dust, the stinks, the pilfering (Murphy 13).

Not all outsiders traverse across a country with a narrative authority or hegemonic superiority over the natives; nevertheless, all travellers have liberty to criticise any country for its lack of hygiene, scarcity of clean water, insufferable weather, and other geographical and topographical limitations. Murphy, throughout her stay in India, more specifically during her stay in Mumbai, incessantly criticises city for its, "scenes of poverty, filth and squalor" (Murphy 16) and its people for the "world's greatest mass-manifestation of the ostrich-mentality" (Murphy16). But, from the vantage point of a European/Westerner, Dervla Murphy is required to either claim for herself an authoritative imperialist narrative position where she could either exoticize the country and its natives or present them as primitive, backward and subhuman and criticise the country for its economic and financial constraints, its religious beliefs, rigid caste system and faulty politics. Since historically, like travelling and travel writing, colonialism is a male preserve where females have only a secondary or supporting role, many women travellers till 19th century assumed the position of authority usually 'coded as masculine' (Bird 124). Even Sara Mills in *Discourses of Differences* contends the concept of female subordinate travellers and came to the understanding that, "although colonial discourse is described in a unified way, women's texts cannot easily be accommodated within its descriptive framework" (Mills 47). It is also maintained by many critics that women travel writers tended to concentrate on descriptions of people as individuals, rather than on statements about the race as a whole, or on the religion and politics of the country. But the argument holds no water when we talk about Dervla Murphy in the context of her opinion on serious issues like religion and politics of the country. In the course of her stay in India in 1973 for almost 4 months, Murphy has met numerous locals and indeed, introduced those to her readers in detail, talking about their appearance, dress, accent, wisdom and knowledge, but on the other hand, her understanding of Indian politics, religion, caste and class system was no less assertive. On many occasions, it is interesting to note that, she has generalised her views while commenting on locals, "The Malayalis look far better developed than the average crowd to be seen on a European beach" (Murphy121), "the people of Coorg are no less exceptional than the landscape; both men and women make one feel welcome to a degree that is most uncommon in India" (58). But on the other hand, her opinion on Indian politics and religion are marked by her thorough understanding and awareness of the subject, "India's two Communist parties (both of which claim to be the One True Party) are known as the Right Communists (Soviet) and the Left Communists (Chinese)" (123). To show her expertise Murphy has even dedicated an entire chapter on the subject of caste and untouchability in Coorg region, "If the bonds of the caste system could be so easily broken Indian society would have evolved along very different lines", (58) she observed. Though Murphy's perception of Indians, Indian culture, religion, and tradition was shocking and upsetting at the beginning, when she was adjusting to the new surroundings; we may witness that it took a happy turn on her arrival at Coorg where, she exclaimed "it is the only place, outside of my own little corner of Ireland, where I could imagine myself happy to live permanently" (201).

Regardless of her just being an outsider in India, her knowledge and understanding of religions, especially Hinduism, in India, though may appear prejudiced on several occasions, on other occasions appeared substantially generalised, is bookish. The word 'Hindu' appeared 148 times and 'caste' 90 times in the text, hence, stresses her authenticity as a factual traveller.

The facts were all based on the information gathered from the local newspapers, history books and National Gazetteer. One of the surprising aspects of Murphy's works on India, is that though she writes at length about the colonial past of the country, and agreed with the history that Britain's colonial role was mainly to civilise India and help the country to function smoothly and even goes so far as to extend advice to the government on the best way for the relationship to be developed with the neighbouring country, her narratorial position as a superior race is not firm, and not subjective to the criticism of any one race, religion or nationality rather generalised, as if to avoid herself taking any controversial stance.

Sara Mills was of the opinion that many women travel writers "seem quite able to give accounts which draw on racist discourses, but are unable to adopt narratorial positions which are traditionally seen as masculine" (Mills 196). It is worth noting that instead of establishing her hegemony over the depressed race, Dervla Murphy had, to some extent, acclimatised herself with the natives culture and sometimes, even seemed to work hard to gain the confidence of the indigenous. Rather than enforcing her authoritative voice, she was more concerned to assert Rachel's status as a westerner. She justified Rachels's actions towards Indian children with culturally appropriate explanation, "a white child, who is being brought up in a totally unimperialistic environment of liberty, equality and fraternity, should unconsciously and effortlessly take up where the Raj left off" (Murphy 63). This comment though has a tinge of westerner superiority, lacks firmness. Throughout the text we find Dervla Murphy pointing out Rachel's responses, actions and reactions against seeing anything new, old or native, "Rachel was thrilled to see craftsmen at work behind their stall" (20), "Rachel was fascinated to see bananas growing on trees, cows lying on city pavements and a crow boldly swooping down to steal a piece of toast off a street-vendor's stall" (17), "Rachel seemed a little disappointed by her first corpse" (83), which were a part of her juggling between her roles as a mother and a traveller.

In the text, there are passages where we witness a pull in both the directions: between her authoritative position as a Western traveller from a superior race and her position as a woman traveller who travels for adventure. Sometimes she is sympathetic to the natives and wishes to show that British people are wrong to make negative comments about them,

> On the whole, the British influence, like that of many earlier conquerors, is being inexorably assimilated into India's dharma, which eventually will be a little changed by this contribution as by all the others – though the changes will not necessarily be those the British would have wished to effect (Murphy 54).

Then there are many statements which are of a colonialist nature, but undermined by her other positive statements about the same people:

> We were on the back seat among the Harijans and looking down that bus was like being at a flower show, so many young women had decorated their glossy black coiffures with exotic scented blossoms, fresh from the jungle. Those are the little touches that make India – for all its obtrusive squalor – seem so much more graceful than present-day Europe (56-57).

There are also instances where she aligned herself with natives and appeared to be taking the stance of 'going native' and notwithstanding her westerner position, allowed the natives to speak for themselves, in contrary to many male imperialist travellers, where natives were, "Gazed upon, they are denied the power of the gaze; spoken to, they are denied the power to speak freely" (Spur14). In view of the account of her sympathy towards Indian in other parts of the text, it is surprising that in several sections she accepts the knowledge presented by colonial writers. Ironically, she has quoted and referred to almost all western historian to

narrate facts about Indian history, caste and politics. But even these textual references are not align as a supporter of imperialism, but settle her as a reader of only English authors, someone who's apprehensive to trust Indian scholars to refer Indian politics and history. In her attempt of 'going native' Dervla Murphy end up exoticizing the country and its people. Even Maureen Mulligan in her article, "Representations of India in the Female Gaze: Four Women Travellers", while discussing women colonial travel writers, presented Murphy as someone who exoticised India at her own convivence, "Both Dervla Murphy and Robyn Davidson fall into the trap of idealizing a romantic dreamscape in which economic progress is seen as the enemy (until it comes to their own needs for comfort and security)" (Mulligan 59).

Feminist Discourse

Travel writing is a hybrid genre which sets multiple discourses, including that of gender, into motion. Women travellers travel with an array of restrictions on their part – gender, class, reasons for travelling, publication, etc which leave a definite impact in the process of writing the text. Derval Murphy's narratives of journeying to various Indian cities, towns and villages via road and train travels open, renew and (re)gender the genre of travel writing. It is while dwindling between the roles of an 'outsider' and a 'European/Westerner', we witness Murphy, problematising her feminist stance as well. Murphy uses her travel writing to empower herself and all the solo women travellers to challenge the public sphere, dominated by men and male gaze and open up a new domain where women can travel to all the corners of the world, unassisted, unchaperoned, clearly transgressing many of the codes of femininity. First and the foremost code of travelling challenged by Murphy was the use of non-archetypal feminine form of travel. During her first travel to India from Lismore on a bicycle, Murphy had clearly became guilty of breaking the social order of patriarchal mode of travelling. By travelling in threatening and dangerous situations all her life, Dervla has had transgressed protocols of women travelling alone. By planning and executing the entire travel from talking to different embassies, to taking all the decisions related to lodging and food, she has declared herself as an independent, strong figure who faced the extremes of hardship and severity with courage, without making any reference to 'feminine' concerns.

"Sartorial choices can be a safe means of escaping constrictive gender norms" (121), says Dúnlaith Bird. Murphy in her journeys to various countries did not dressed up in frocks and dresses like many colonial female travellers, Isabella Bird, Mary Kingsley, and Gertrude Bell, instead, she was dressed up in shirts and trousers, not because "to speak with authority she must wear a male disguise" (Schaffer 103), but because she found those clothes comfortable, and consider those just a necessity to cover her body, "One of the joys of the expedition was getting away from dress with its worries as distinguished from mere clothes," (*Full Tilt* 7) says Murphy. By not following the norms of cross-cultural dressing and the lady-like dressing, Dervla Murphy has again transgressed the long-standing traditions of women travels to a foreign land. Again, unlike many women travel writers, where femininity of the narrator is foregrounded; Murphy never bring her being a woman traveller to forefront, instead, she comments, "gender is, just there, you're not focusing on it. It's just how you are, you're a woman, that's it" (*Full Tilt* 20). Hence, the lack of 'feminine' elements in the text, somehow, gives the readers, a liberty to position Murphy at an asserting authoritative place against the non-assertive and conforming feminine character of the narrators of many other women travel texts.

Conclusion

If Dervla Murphy would not have ended up at Coorg, I believe that her perception of India and Indians would not have taken a paradigm shift from being intolerant traveller who found fault with everything and everyone as witnessed by the readers in her *Full Tilt*, "if the poverty of India has not yet hit me the smell of India certainly have," (Murphy 249) to a person who exclaimed, "Every day I fall more seriously in love with Coorg; it is the only place, outside of my own little corner of Ireland, where I could imagine myself happy to live permanently," (Murphy 201) towards the end of her sojourn in Coorg.

In a tightly argued analysis, I would like to conclude that Derval Murphy have in various phases transgressed the norms of colonial discourse, and presented a strong subversion of the feminine discourse also, but we cannot also forget her prejudices and condescending behaviour when occasionally she presented herself as a superior class and race. On several occasions, her perspectives coloured by her knowledge of belonging to the dominant breed or race. Because of diverse sarcastic comments on casteism, religion, poverty, and politics in India, Murphy can certainly not be seen as speaking for colonialism or a colonialist in perspective. Interestingly, despite her harsh criticism of Indians' lack of cleanliness and hygiene, oversensitive stance and blind faith in religion, adherence to old-age customs and caste system, I shall argue that though Murphy is an 'European traveller', her acclimatisation in Indian culture and her understanding of Indian tradition and religion, "Kali is of course Siva's wife and she is also known as Sati, Gauri, Annapurna, Parvati, Durga, Bhawani and Devi" cancelled out her prejudiced comments. Though her first work, *Full Tilt*, was more attractive and gained her critical acclaim, this text showed her matured commentary and perception. Therefore, in her travelogue(s), we hear two contradictory voices – one who follows the conventions of an imperial traveller, a European explorer, an authoritative voice, who looks down upon everything native and maintains her hegemony positioning herself culturally and racially superior, and the other which subverts the previous voice and mingles freely with locals, eating local cuisine, participating in local merry making and festivities as adventure and exploring always lie at the foreground of all her journeys. Hence, the complexity of the position Murphy has had with India allows us to read her text(s) in context of multiple discourses. As women traveller/travel writers cannot be said to speak from outside colonial discourse when travelling to colonial or post-colonial countries, and their relation to the dominant discourse becomes problematic because of its clash with the discourses of femininity, their work "exhibits contradictory elements which may act as a critique of some of the components of other colonial writings" (Mills 63). This could possibly be one of the reasons for Murphy's failed attempt to adopt a strong imperialist voice. But the main reason for any women traveller's subdued voice is the non-availability of different theoretical tools for studying women travel texts. As it is difficult to fit women travel writers' work within the conventional orientalist framework, which is hovered by male dominance, it is indispensable to constitute some alternative tools and mechanism to study and scrutinise the conflicting discourses at work in their texts. Though her feminine voice is undermined by her unconventional, non-lady like behaviour; her dressing, her mode of travelling, her being an imperialist traveller is undercut by her own identity as a native of once colonised country, Ireland.

To conform with Sara Mills who said that it is not possible to put women travellers in any one category of just being a colonial or being a feminist, *On a Shoestring to Coorg,* could not be read just as a colonial text or a feminist text but a text by an intrepid traveller from a

European country who happened to be a woman by gender. Hence to study women in colonial context there is a need to reformulate the model of textuality to analyse women texts in context of critical colonial discourse. I would like to conclude with what Sara Mills contextualises in her *Gender and Colonial Space*:

> It is difficult to analyse women's colonial writing, since it is only possible to talk about tendencies towards alignment with discourses of colonialism or tendencies towards a writing dominated by the discourses of femininity, since the women themselves differed greatly in their positioning in relation to both discourses (Mills 58).

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Afghanistan Women's Turmoil in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

R.S. Subramanyam
Research scholar
Palamuru University
Mahabubnagar (Telangana) India
rssubramanyam1974@gmail.com

Dr. Sandhya Tiwari
Asst. Professor (S.G.) and Head
Department of English
Palamuru University
Mahabubnagar (Telangana) India
drstpu@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper is aimed to explore the causes of women's sufferings in the novel A Thousand Splendid Suns *by Khaled Hosseini. It offers a critical analysis of the institutions that are the reasons behind women's sufferings. The article primarily focuses on a close study of women characters in the novel. Khaled Hosseini sets his novel in Kabul and other places in Afghanistan at the time of war with Russia. Afghan women were subjected to subservient treatment in society. They were treated as slaves to men and this derogatory existence resulted in eclipsing their very existence as equal citizens under Islamic religious oppression. The religious fanaticism in Afghanistan created many miseries for the women in the novel. In this novel, Hosseini portrayed the unhealthy social practices like patriarchy, racism, anarchy, and extremism of Taliban culture through the three female characters Mariam, Laila and Aziza. These three female characters are critically analyzed to put forth the cruelties of orthodox religion, patriarchal family system and Taliban extremist culture. This paper presents the authentic everyday life of Afghan women.*
Keywords: Women sufferings, Khaled Hosseini, A Thousand Splendid Suns, Afghanistan, Taliban culture.

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Introduction

A Thousand Splendid Suns (2007) is the second novel of Khaled Hosseini, which portrays the poignant characters of Nana, Fariba, Mariam, Laila and Aziza in the backdrop of Afghan culture. This is a heartbreaking story of an Afghan woman. The country, religion, society and even family members who are affectionate in life become enemies and cause great hardships to women. From the dawn of creation till today, women have continued to suffer and are persecuted by men, society and religion. Moreover, Afghan women are tormented

severely in the name of orthodox Taliban culture. No matter how heartbroken they are, they still silently live their lives under the *burqa* culture. They won't dare to raise their voice against any authority in their culture. Their hearts are filled with the everyday battles of their lives and crumpled with agonies that are caused by the brutality of the patriarchal world. Afghan women are not even sharing their worries with anybody. No one is ready to understand their miseries. Khaled Hosseini presented the collective spirit of 'Afghanistan Muslim Women' in this novel. Though this novel was considered fiction, it authentically reflects the lives of women in Kabul. It portrays awful events of war hysteria of anti-Soviet-Jihad and the tyrannical order of the Taliban. Hosseini portrayed patriarchy, racism, anarchy and extremism of Taliban culture through the three female characters Mariam, Laila and Aziza in this novel.

'Harami' (A Bastard Child): Mariam

The novel starts with the word 'Harami' (A bastard child) referring to the central character Mariam as a bastard child. The origin of the novel and its essence lies in this single word. It reveals the atrocities experienced by the woman. It conveys the plight of Afghan women. Mariam is not a woman like her mother Nana who crumbles to circumstances as she seeks answers to her hardships rather than fall. Mariam is a woman who has her life traveled from ignorance to wisdom and has been destined from darkness to light. She sacrifices her life to give a new life to Laila even though she cannot find the answer to her life. Mariam is a bridge between the life journeys of Nana to Laila. So Khaled Hosseini called this story “Mother and Daughter” and his *The Kite Runner* is a '"Father and Son" story. The novel features a unique set of mother-daughter intimate relations. We can see how women have become victims in the play of men and society. In her childhood, Mariam had conflicts with her mother Nana because of Jalil, and after her marriage, she had conflicts with Laila because of Rasheed. How Jalil hurts Nana and daughter Mariam, and Rashid causes troubles for his wife Mariam, Laila, and the daughter Aziza, is the main story of the novel. This is not just a story of a few women; it's a sorrowful state of all Afghan women.

Nana's Tumultuous World: The Shadow of Mariam

Mariam gets a second jolt when she returns to her mother in *Kolbe* after she lost her hope at Herat. Knowing about her mother's committing suicide, Mariam sadly went into tears and deeply felt that she could not forgive herself throughout her life. After her mother Nana commits suicide, Mariam was kindly received by Faizullah, the Quran teacher and spiritual man, and he hands over her to her father Jalil at his home. But everyone treated her as a stranger in Jalil's home. She didn't experience any previous love of her father that she experienced when she was in *kolba.* Why all of these sufferings to Nana and Mariam?

No matter how great the love between human beings is, it is an illicit relationship when society does not accept it. Though Jalil is not cruel to create trouble for them, he is a puppet in the hands of society. Nana's mistake was not there in the love relationship with Jalil. But Nana's life was spoiled by Jalil. The highly rich man Jalil was fascinated by the beauty of his maidservant Nana and forced her into a physical relationship. When society knew of the

illicit relationship between them, Nana's father felt insulted; he abandoned his residence in 'Herat'. Nana did not even get any help from her only surviving father to protect herself from the disgrace of society. That is Nana's miserable situation created by Jalil and society. Nana has to live away from Herat like an outcast person whose life is expelled from Herat. Also her baby Mariam lives like a vicious bastard kid. Nanda Silima in an article titled "Subjugation: A Study of Women characters" in Khaled Hosseini's remarks:

> One of the most striking resemblances in the female characters of Hosseini is that they are internally circumscribed in a vicious circle of guilt which they try to bridge by punishing themselves (458).

Jalil did not send at least one midwife to Nana's home to help in her delivery when she was pregnant; this is extreme cruelty towards women by men. With the help of just one knife, Nana cut her umbilical cord on her own with great pain during the birth of her child Mariam. Not even a single person helps her during her delivery; she experienced terrible agony during her pregnancy. This incident creates a high emotional impact on the minds of readers. It generates a cathartic effect on the readers.

How a man turns vicious towards his own loved ones can be seen in the character of Jalil. Mariam does not know Jalil's true picture in her childhood. He is a facade in a loving father's appearance. Though he is not cruel at heart, he created great miseries for both women. He destroyed the lives of two women for the sake of his social status and his selfishness. He gives them no good life and makes them depressed. Unable to resist male dominance and social pressures, Nana crumbled at her heart and warned her child Mariam about coming difficulties from men and society. But Mariam didn't care for her mother's words and repented years later with guilt. Nana says, "To Jalil and his wives, I was a pokeroot. A mugwort" (Hosseini 18).

Nana says to Mariam, "you too nothing to your father and his family". Nana preaches this message constantly to Mariam "Woman is nothing to man and society. Always, a man shows fault with a woman. As a bastard child you will have rejection from every one of the society. This pathetic condition of us can't be altered or improved." After the death of her mother, Mariam realized all the truths of her mother's sayings. Though the story revolves around the central character Mariam, Nana's role is the shadow of Mariam.

'*Kabul Hi'* (I agree): Marriage Promise Made Mariam Victimized

After the death of Nana, Mariam was brought to Jalil's house by her Quran master Faizullah. It has become inevitable for her to stay in Jalil's house unwillingly. Though there are many riches in Jalil's house, Mariam lost every interest in Jalil. She was so guilty of her innocence that she could not believe her mother's words. She was blinded to see the truth in her affection for her father. Mariam has known the pain and value of her mother. Everyone in Jalil's family considered Mariam a burden to be relieved immediately. Most probably, Jalil's three wives plotted against Mariam and wanted to decide to throw her from the house. No one thinks about the welfare of Mariam in that house – the only person that was 'Nana' but she lost her with her foolhardiness. Jalil and his three wives forced Mariam to marry an old man Rasheed, a shoemaker in Kabul who is 30 years older than her age. Mariam's wedding would

take place in a tumultuous moment and the bride would be sent with a receipt as if she had thrown the trash out of the house. It was decided that Mariam should not come again to Jalil's house as they have chosen a bridegroom who is a native of Kabul which is 600 km far from Herat.

Even her marriage ceremonies were performed forcefully as if she was a mute animal in a slaughterhouse or a sacrificial lamb at the altar. When *Mullah Sahib* asks Mariam 'Kabul Hi' for her consent during the marriage ceremony (it is customary in Islamic tradition), Mariam could not express her consent. Then her father Jalil moved towards her in disturbing moods and she clearly understood her hopeless situation and gave her consent with great sorrow. We can't see this type of weeping at weddings anywhere but in Afghanistan, this is the common everyday routine in women's lives. This incident completely breaks the relationship between 'Father and Daughter' in the novel. She went to Kabul with Rasheed with burdened heart and never returned to Herat. Wali M. Rahimi, the author of *Status of Women: Afghanistan*, argues:

> The position of women in Afghanistan has traditionally been inferior to that of men. This position has varied according to age, socio-cultural norms, and ethnicity. Afghan women, even until the beginning of the 20th century were the slaves of their fathers, husbands, fathers-in-law, and elder brothers. Her most valued characteristic was silence and obedience (6).

Mariam feels somewhat happy and comfortable in Kabul and her life with Rasheed went on happily in the early days. Mariam evolves to understand the people, situations, and mainly Rasheed. She showed great tolerance in understanding the good and bad of Rasheed. But Rasheed is also a staunchly committed orthodox Muslim. If a daughter is born he is a crook who wants to kill instead of loving her. Time tested him for his humanity in many ways. But he failed to be a good man and even tried to kill his wives Mariam and Laila. We could see Rasheed is a false follower of Islam. The prophet forbade men to beat their wives. The Spanish imam Mohamed Kamal Mostafa's book *Women in Islam* "recommends verbal correction followed by a period of sexual abstinence as the best punishment for a wife, but does not rule out a beating as long as it is kept within strict guidelines." It further specifies that the husband "should never hit his wife in a state of extreme or blind anger" (Spencer 91).

Eventually, Mariam bravely prepares to confront her husband and the wild community, even if they are firmly entrenched. When Rasheed tried to squeeze the throat of Laila, Mariam took the shovel and hit on the head of him causing his death. This is the end for Rasheed and a pitiable end for the troubles of these women. This shows the effects of Islamic fundamentalism on the situations and characters in this novel. Islamic feminism is an oxymoron and Islamic women are caught as victims between Islamic fundamentalism and liberal feminism. Islamic fundamentalism won't allow Muslim women to have liberty, and equality, and go or think against to Quran as per their religious legal code. Modern liberal feminism evoked the Muslim women's world to rise against the discriminations and criminalities of the patriarchal world in Islamic society through the established *Sharia*. By the late 1980s, this challenge acquired the identity of *Islamic Feminism.* Muslim women started to revolt against the patriarchal interpretations of their sacred text like the character Rasheed who suppresses his wives and a girl child in the name of religious law in this novel.

> Islamic feminists like Assia Djebar, Fatima Mernissi, Nawal El Saadawi, and Zaynab al-Ghazali are learning how to take advantage of the transnationalism of Islam to empower themselves as women and as Muslims. From their multiple situations they are critiquing the global, local, and domestic institutions they consider damaging to them as women, as Muslims, and as citizens of their countries and of the world, while remaining wary of outsiders' desires to co-opt their struggle. (Women Claim Islam 61)

Mariam confronted this situation in her country because of Islamic fundamentalism and struggled to give at least a good life to her daughter like Laila. Mariam was successful in letting them escape from Kabul and set them to start a new life in Pakistan. Mariam took the blame for the murder of her husband on her head and prepares to die bravely like a martyr in the limelight of the Afghanistan people. It was her mother-like love for Laila that motivated her to do that adventure. Mariam was bold to face the coming situations due to the death of her husband.

After Laila escaped, Mariam was put in prison by the Taliban for the offense of killing her husband. Mariam was also sentenced to death by religious counsel by *Mullahs.* She didn't afraid of anything, she didn't even think about God, she didn't regret, she only thought about Zalmai, the son of Laila by Rasheed, from whom she had taken the love of his life. That was the true spirit of a mother. Mariam was killed for killing her husband and no chance was given to her to prove her point of view. Mariam died peacefully without any fear as if a mother would die for her children.

Laila is a New Hope for Mariam

At the climax of the story, when the two wives of Rasheed, Laila and Mariam, could not stop the domestic violence of Rasheed, they decided to escape from his house. But they were caught by Rasheed. Then Rasheed tried to strangle Laila's throat, and instantly Mariam hit on his head with a shovel. Rasheed would die. She protects Laila from the cruel hands of Rasheed. She let Laila and the children go with Tariq to Pakistan without her. Though they insisted Mariam go along with them, Mariam thought her absence would create a lot of trouble so she firmly decided to stay at home waiting for her death sentence by the Taliban. Then Mariam spent ten days in prison.

> Before they led her out, Mariam was given a document and told to sign beneath her statement and the mullah's sentence. As the three Taliban watched, Mariam wrote it out, her name—the meem, the reh, the yah, and the meem—remembering the last time she'd signed her name to a document, twenty-seven years before, at Jalil's table, beneath the watchful gaze of another mullah. (Hosseini 265)

Mariam signed her name at the time of marriage and at the time of her sentence to death. The tragic irony is that her marriage and death are the same in this cruel patriarchal and religious frenetic world. Her question is whether society cannot think about how a helpless woman can commit the crime of murder. She thinks before her death, “This was a legitimate end to a life of illegitimate beginnings” (Hosseini 297).

A New Woman: Laila, a New Hope for Afghanistan

Laila's character is introduced in the novel as a 21st Century Woman who seeks liberties as a symbol of a new stream of life. Laila won't have any hardships that were experienced by Nana and Mariam. She understands the greatness of communism from her childhood, just as she understands Islam. Laila was mostly fascinated by the decrees of the communist era that women had enjoyed freedom between 1978 and 1992. Laila is the true representative of liberal feminism. Liberal feminism seeks answers to feminist questions with a gradual approach rather than a radical and revolutionary approach. This quite suits to Islamic social milieu. It slowly and gradually establishes equality based on the empowerment of women through education and financial independence of women. Western Liberal feminism creates a strong foundation for woman's role in social, economic and political spheres with the equality of men. Laila, the chief protagonist next to Mariam appears as a liberal feminist in the novel. Liberal feminism has its roots in the writings of, among others, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), and Harriet Taylor Mill (1807-1858). A few philosophers, such as John Locke (1632-1704), argued that the sexes should receive the same education and that they shared equal rights and responsibilities concerning their children. (Locke's two treatises,303). Laila knows the importance of education for the enlightenment of Muslim women of her nation very well.

Women were encouraged to pursue education and thought of as free souls under the Russian communist government. Laila was not convinced by the cruelties created by *Sharia,* strict Islamic laws that ordered women only to suppress them. Women are forbidden to go to school, to work, to travel alone, to wear jewelry, to laugh in public, and to speak in public. Women should always stay inside their homes. They should dare not come outside without *a burqa.* The people are blinded by religious frenzy and so busy killing each other and ready to severely punish the women who didn't follow the *Sharia.* Laila's innocent spirit won't see any welfare of women in these laws. Besides, she questioned herself and others about these meaningless laws in many instances in her life. She thought in the name of religious laws, they were spoiling the progress of the nation and causing more suffering to women. She saw the absurdity of half the population of a nation sitting in their homes and doing nothing and their lives will go in vain.

Laila was greatly impressed to see how communists helped their country's women to get an education and new enlightenment. Laila has been fascinated to see the beauty of the soul and ideal nature of Tariq and his family from her childhood. We can see one more pathetic character Fariba, the mother of Laila who lost her two sons in the anti-Soviet 'Jihadi' war. Fariba lost her interest in her life after the death of her two sons. This disturbed her family. Laila didn't consider *the Jihadi* deaths of her brothers as great sacrifices for the sake of the country. In her country, where always bullets are shredding people into pieces, she didn't feel any peace and happiness during such terrorist activities. She thought her two innocent brothers became victims of blind ignorance of their religion. Laila did not consider her brother's death as sacred as that of a soldier who dies for his country. Laila was beaten up by the Taliban many times just because she was not with a male guardian. The medieval barbarism of the Taliban killed many innocent young men in the nation. Laila witnessed the

great adversity and denial of basic human rights primarily for women under the Taliban rule of Afghanistan. Men can have many wives as per *Sharia.* This kills the identity of women.

Conclusion

Suppression of Afghan women due to patriarchal set-up, marriage, pregnancy, and orthodox religious traditions is depicted in the selected novel. These women don't have the freedom to get an education, to choose a husband on their own, to speak openly, to give birth to a female baby, to break marriage as their counterparts (their husbands) easily can do, to move openly in the society without the accompaniment of males, and finally to express their true feelings. If they do, they will be severely executed in the name of religion. Women are dying due to forced pregnancies by their husbands. Women do not have the choice or right to give birth to their children. Women are never allowed to get an education under orthodox religious laws. Many women confront domestic violence as a common routine in their lives. Men thought they were superior to women by their religious laws. They would humiliate their life partners in many heinous ways. It has become a common practice of physical and psychological violence in the households of Afghanistan. Women lost their true identity due to forced marriages caused by their fathers and other family members. Inequality between two genders would not create any happy world or any strong nation.

Thus, Khaled Hosseini's Novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* occupies a pivotal position in acquainting the pain of Afghan women's turmoil and subjugation. They exist as insignificant beings sans an identity of their own. In the name of religion, women's freedom is curtailed ever since birth. This gender bias can be attributed to the extreme ideology of a few groups in the name of religion. In other words, violence has become the true religion of a few powerful people. The article reiterates the fact that women, who are the very source of life, cannot be subjected to oppression and subservience. For the betterment of society, women should be given the freedom to lead happy lives. They should be given a good education. No government or no nation is considered good when they create shackles to women's lives. A thoughtful woman can only raise her voice against these barbarous traditions.

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Exploring the Aesthetics of Sexual Violence in Therese Park's *A Gift of the Emperor* (1997): A Study on Korean Comfort Women

Khushboo Verma
Research Scholar
Department of Humanities & Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology
Roorkee (Uttrakhand) India
kverma@hs.iitr.ac.in

Dr. Nagendra Kumar
Professor
Department of Humanities & Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology
Roorkee (Uttrakhand) India
nagendra.kumar@hs.iitr.ac.in

Abstract

The use of rape as a weapon of war has been in the existence for as early as the middle ages. Therese Park's first novel, A Gift of the Emperor *(1997), describes one such atrocious incident wherein she highlights the active role the Japanese military played in procuring and condoning trafficking of women, who were euphemistically referred to as 'comfort women', for prostitution during World War II. This paper thus aims to look at the re-membering and reckonings of these women in the artistic representations. The essay, particularly, attempts to explore the aesthetics of rape and sexual violence as represented or (not)represented by Park in her novel as she attempts to give voice to the victim and retain her and her suffering as the central focus of the narrative.*
Keywords: Korean Comfort Women, Survivors' Testimonies, Sexual Slavery, Aesthetics of Sexual Violence, Spoils of War

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Sexual violence against both men and women has always been an instrument of terror during armed conflicts spanning over the time from Ancient Greek and the Israel to the conflicts in Bosnia- Herzegovina and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Women have often been treated as spoils of war, a reward gifted to the conquering soldiers by their superiors; often excused as part of the collateral damage that is unavoidable in the conflict zones or so they claim. The Western Allied soldiers also committed mass rapes during the liberation of Berlin. For more than 70 years, this sexual violence remained hidden from the history books as also did the mass rapes and massacres carried out in 1944 by the soldiers of the French expeditionary corps during the Italian Campaign. Both of these incidents were systematically carried out and deliberately expunged from the official accounts which only recorded their soldiers' honour and glory. Similar case of systematic sexual violence against women, which is the major investigative focus of this paper, emerged from the 'comfort women' issue when one of the thousands of young women, euphemistically referred to as 'comfort women' by the

Japanese Imperial Army, finally gave her testimony in 1992 to have been held in sexual slavery during the Second World War. The association between the military and prostitution as seen in the above examples reflects the amalgamation of patriarchal ideologies, hyper masculinity and feminine sexuality. As Margaret Stetz and Bonnie Oh contend in their book, "In times of war, values of patriarchal order are pushed to the extreme, brutal force and physical strength are admired and rewarded, and those men who are in uniform and engaged either in combat or in confined, regimented situations become preoccupied with sex" (*Legacies of the Comfort Women* 6). The military officials have tried to legitimize the presence of prostitution near army establishments and bases with the ages old patriarchal platitudes such as 'men will be men', that soldiers because of working under pressure and living in secluded places are compelled or expected to exercise their unbounded sexual appetite in one form or the other. Post the Nanjing massacre of 1937, the Japanese Army expanded its network of military brothels with the idea that this would help preserve its reputation and channel the sexual urges of its soldiers.

Korean American author, Therese Park in her first novel, *A Gift of the Emperor* (1997) captures in a great length the active participation of Japanese military in arranging and trafficking women, mostly from rural working classes, for the sexual enslavement to the Japanese soldiers during WWII. Young girls and women, ranging from age limit of 12 to 30 from different Japanese colonies of that time such as Korea, Malaysia, China, Indonesia and the Philippines were misled, abducted and rounded up by the Imperial Japanese Army and were forced to work as sex slaves in what were called the 'comfort stations'. The first international recognition of this issue began at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (1992, 1993) and henceforth emerged the different forms and representations of the victims and silences of military sexual slavery in the fields of academic, political activism and artistic works.

South Korean activist, Kim Bok-dong in 2016 described her horrifying experiences in an interview as such:

> Some men in uniform came along, a police officer and the head of the village. They said I had to go to a factory that manufactured war materials. My mother said that I was too young to work in a factory. They said that if I refused to go, there would be an act of treason against Japan. They would confiscate our possessions and my family would be deported. I was almost 14 years old […] I spent 8 years as a slave of the Japanese army, sweating blood for them. (*Asian Boss*)

There are other testimonial reports of comfort women who attempted to escape and were treated with utmost brutality by the Japanese soldiers. Another South Korean activist, Shim Dal-Yeon, recounted her ordeal and revealed about how one woman who tried to run away from the comfort station was caught by the soldiers who then "killed [her] and boiled her flesh in a big pot, [and] lied to us that it was beef soup and we ate it" (Joh). It is also important to remember that only about 25% of the two hundred thousand women remained alive after the end of the Second World War, albeit not without psychological trauma, painful memories, and torn or injured bodies. Diseases, suicides, sexual abuses and politically motivated murders claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of these women whose plight is now impossible or incapacitated to describe in language. Many of the remaining survivors remained childless or were unable to bear children because of their permanently injured wombs or because of their other psychological and emotional scars. Despite all the disturbing evidence presented by many comfort women scholars, human right activists and former comfort women's testimonies, Osaka's Mayor, Toru Hashimoto in 2013 asserted that these

women were "necessary to maintain the morale and discipline of the soldiers in combat. (*Clarin*)

The present novel revolves around one such fictional character named, Soon-ah who shares her disturbing journey from abduction by the military to landing up at the comfort station where she was sexually enslaved and raped multiple times by many Japanese soldiers. Park has marshalled a first-person narrative in her novel which makes it appear like a memoir which is now mostly associated with a human rights narrative genre. Other than Park, there are other fictional works by Korean-American authors who have attempted to showcase the historical reality of comfort women in their novels from different perspectives. For instance, Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life* (1999) narrates the fictional story of a young medic who is tasked to treat these women at a military camp in Burma during the second world war. The novel is thus told from a doctor's perspective who in his later life is haunted by the horrific memories of his encounter with one such comfort woman. While Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman* (1997) unfolds the psychological murmurings of a former comfort women and the consequences of the atrocities explored through her relationship with her adolescent daughter. Both of these fictions narrate the story years after the incident has occurred while Park's novel traces the odyssey of a comfort woman in a linear pattern from kidnapping to her landing up at the military camp. There are other non-fictional works available on the issue of comfort women which attempt to gather and document the gut-wrenching statements and evidences from the remaining survivors, such as Dai Sil Kim-Gibson's documentary work, *Silence Broken: Korean Comfort Women* (1999).

This essay attempts to investigate the representations of sex trafficked women in terms of their agency through the protagonist of the novel and the violence committed against them by the military which both plays the role of the trafficker and the consumer and explores how it memorizes the history of Japanese colonial violence and exploitation. The very beginning line of the novel introduces the readers with the colonized background when Soon-ah describes that, "On the front wall of our high school classroom hung a huge portrait of Emperor Hirohito." (1) The forced submission to the Japanese Emperor emphasizes the ideological and repressive state-apparatuses where the Korean school children sing "the Japanese national anthem as loudly as [they] could", and are prohibited to speak in their own native language (1). This echoes Ngugi Wa Thiongo's lines from his exemplary Public Lecture (2017) where he proclaims that "in colonial conquest, language did to the mind what the sword did to the bodies of the colonized" ("Secure the Base"). It is in such colonized circumstances, the Japanese military plots to traffic girls and young women in the garb of "tend[ing] to the soldiers' wounds, to talk to them, and entertain them and to be the Emperor's special gifts to the soldiers!" (4). The narration is then followed two weeks later, where the young girls from school are recruited and subjected to a mortified examination of their genitals to ensure their virginity. According to the Japanese officials, this would lessen the chances of the soldiers contracting venereal diseases like Syphilis. However, all of Soon-ah's attempts at hiding goes in vain when she is finally caught by the Japanese officials who then forcefully take her away and send her in a confined ship along with other young girls in order to be transported to comfort stations in Palau in the war zone where they are expected to service the soldiers as sex slaves. Park, from the very beginning of the novel has tried to not present the protagonist of her novel as a victim but someone who has a voice despite all the horrible things happening to her. This voice, however, is however hard to find in most of the real comfort women during their ordeals. Soon-ah is shown as a distinguished Korean woman mainly for her "flawless Japanese and physical beauty" (36). These qualities have supposedly

proved to be 'helpful' for her as it makes her the centre of attraction for the higher officials as compared to the rest of other girls who are destined to be the slaves of lower-ranked soldiers. Most of these girls are later killed by the same soldiers by the end of the novel.

Soon-ah is shown at several places in the novel to be having an agency to speak against some of the soldiers who do not abide by the written rules during their sexual encounters. The other girls are however depicted in a submissive light who lower their heads and do exactly what is said to them. Soon-ah's audacity only proves to be even more detrimental to her for when she reminds one soldier that he is not "supposed to kiss [her] in the mouth" and that he is "violating the rules of the military" (42), she gets thrashed by him and later gets reprimanded by the manager. This incident makes her realize that she needs to quietly endure the pain to stay alive at this cruel place. She constantly tries to detach herself from the horrid reality, using a kind of coping mechanism through a dream-like consciousness expressed in the lines, "Remember, you are in a tiger's cave. Do you want to scream at the tiger and poke him? You fool! You must hide like a rabbit in a hole without even breathing" (91). She feels powerless to do anything or to change such a traumatic event in her present life and thus chooses to indulge herself with what trauma studies scholars would say is a "disassociation". In order to disconnect herself from her awful situation, she "separated [her] mind from what was happening so that the physical abuse wouldn't destroy [her] completely." (36). Hence, keeping her head low and following the Japanese army's orders, she manages to suppress her natural instinct of a rebel in order to stay alive. Park provides her protagonist with the ability to alter her perspective: "I suddenly realized that what I have lost is only a few kilograms of my flesh and my childish ideals. I still had my mind and my soul that kept telling me I must love myself in spite of the daily tortures I endured and never dwell on what I had lost" (92).

Another aspect explored by Park emerges through the love affair between Soon-ah and a low-rank Japanese soldier named Sadamu. Laura Reinares argues, "Sadamu's nationality reminds readers that, of course, not all military men became blind subjects to the workings of imperial ideology. This move also undermines the collective mentality typically attributed to the military as it places responsibility on individuals instead" (*Sex Trafficking in Postcolonial Literature* 59). There are significant, however scanty, amount of testimonies in existence written by some of the former Japanese soldiers who years after the end of Second World War realized their seriously abusive and horrible acts meted out to these comfort women.

Hannah Arendt calls this concept the 'banality of evil' and extrapolates how a "quite ordinary, commonplace, and neither demonic nor monstrous person can commit deeds of atrocity without the slightest compunction" (*Eichmann in Jerusalem* 287). The atrocities and the sexual violence against these women are actually not inflicted by psychopaths or sadists but real, sane, ordinary human beings who are endowed with a bureaucratic conscientiousness. However, the Japanese soldiers are still as guilty as anyone with or without any peculiar militarized notion. They have more particularly subjugated and suppressed these Koreans considering them nothing but disposable commodities and have used the Korean women as mere war materials. As Margaret and Oh informs how "they became the displaced and dispossessed- the possessors only of memories, and those seemingly too horrible to share" (*Legacies of the Comfort Women* xi). Park in her novel has sporadically but consciously given us the glimpses of how any comfort woman's life, if she survives, would chart out given the trauma they have suffered. The tragedy of comfort women is thus an eminent case of gendered structural violence which takes its shape from the amalgamation of

social dynamics of power, patriarchy, resistance and violence.

The representation of such sexual violence or rape in the fictional works becomes a huge responsibility for the novelists. They often try not to make these descriptions relegated to mere erotica and avoid voyeuristic details for the readers. Park also eschews describing the rape scenes more elaborately in the novel every time it happens with Soon-ah, but consciously and continuously throws in a few mentions here and there. The first rape of Soon-ah is however dealt with a little detail in the novel where she describes her rapist as a mere 'shadow', a frightening image of the brutal perpetrator:

> Then our door jerked open and a mob of dark figures rushed into the room […] The dark figure struck my face repeatedly. Hot liquid gathered in my mouth and rushed out of my nostrils. His hands tore my skirt and underwear… I couldn't tell if the scream I heard was mine or that of other girls in the room. A huge bolt struck between my legs and drilled into my flesh. It was so painful I couldn't breathe. (15-16)

Soon she realizes that no matter how much she fights back or resists, the only thing that can come out of it is more and more violent rapes and vicious beatings by these demonic people. The captain of the ship who then rapes her confesses to her that "for a soldier, having sex before battle is like drinking a magic potion. It liberates you from the fear of dying, and afterwards you feel as if you've just kissed an immortal chalice. That was the reason why so many women were raped and killed in China. Some soldiers, he laughed again, had sex with dying women because there were no live ones around" (28). That is the extent to which these barbaric soldiers could go to in order to fulfil their sexual urges.

Soon-ah in her second rape expects that she is going to undergo the same brutalization and hence decides to not fight this time and just passively lies down understanding her helpless situation: "He tore my tunic with both hands and pushed me on the bed. I didn't fight. I lay there. He was the conqueror, I the conquered." (28-9).

The metaphors that are used by Park in her novel to describe the detached coping mechanism of the protagonist while being raped are significant here. Since it is understandably difficult and almost impossible to represent or describe the physical tortures of pain during any sexual violence like rapes through language as what Elaine Scarry asserts, "whatever pain achieves, it achieves in part through its unsharability, and it ensures this unsharability through its resistance to language" (*The Body in Pain* 4). Park uses a lot of natural imagery like 'the sea', 'the wind' and 'the hurricane' in order to showcase the reliance of trauma survivors on coping mechanism while they are raped, similar to what Soon-ah experiences:

> I tried to listen to the sound of the waves. It seemed the sea was shouting in protest. The wind cried sharply, scratching the window. Was that the ghost of the dead girl? I believed it was: she seemed to be telling me that Kyung Hwa was in the next room, going through what I was going through now, and all the girls in the large room were being raped again. (29)

The limitations of language to rightly and thoroughly describe the psychological trauma or pain is evident in the lines when Soon-ah confesses about her first rape to the captain of the ship: "Last night, sir, an unknown number of soldiers came into our cabin an did unspeakable things to us . . . The unspeakable things, sir, the same things that the imperial soldiers did to the Chinese women when they invaded Nanjing" (27). The issue of comfort women has been ignored for over five decades after the end of the Second World War. Their worth has been relegated to zilch, in multiple contexts, as possessed with no value. As Stetz and Oh justly assert, "these [women] were chosen for systematic rape, in the first place, because they were

seen as worthless and afterward, defined as worthless, because they had been raped" (*Legacies of the Comfort Women* xii). This impunity enjoyed by the military officials has given them the opportunity to belittle the horrific experience of the women even at the international stage. Park, through her novel, makes her points quite clear about what these women have endured and what is to be expected out of the Japanese government in order to compensate for their losses. The comfort women problematic, according to Stetz and Oh, "opposes, moreover, hierarchies of class that enabled the peoples of several cultures- both Asian and Western- to ignore for decades the fate of the "comfort women", since these were figures from the ranks of the poor and uneducated" (*Legacies of the Comfort Women* xii). This hegemonic ideology is vehemently challenged by the comfort women problematic and the knowledge productions in the same arena. As Sadamu's powerful words to Soon-ah affirm:

> There are things that make us feel ashamed of ourselves and things that make us angry at others. When we wrong others or fail to do something, of course, we feel ashamed of ourselves. But if someone else has wronged you, you must never feel ashamed of yourself, only angry! That's important.! Don't be confused about your feelings, Soon-ah. (136)

The salient features of the comfort women problematic are the basis on which these women are subjected and violated which is, first, their colonized identities and their lower ranks in the status quo.

Conclusion

The neglect of the gendered structural violence against women becomes the grave obstacle to let these voices be heard in the international discourse. The comfort women testimonies and their narratives disclose not only their physical torture at the hands of the Japanese Imperial Army but also reveal the remarkable resilience and determination of these women to demand for the justice, public apology, and official recognition. Owing to the fact that such heinous conducts are preconceived and sanctioned by a supposedly 'civilized' society and supervised by a symbolic institution like the military, the comfort women problematic thus sets out to expose the vulnerable side of the military which has been long overlooked.

Cynthia Enloe also argues that rape "isn't about money and its isn't about sex. It's about power over women" (*Does Khaki Become You?* 118). It is mainly about the male dominance over women, the societal subordination of women and femininity, the hegemonic masculinity that has provided the sociological justification for the state officials for the recruitment of these women to "comfort" the soldiers. As further explained by Baker, this justification is emphasized "often by linking their sexual service to patriotism and national reconstruction efforts" (*Ubiquitous and Unremarked Upon* 12). Many global peacekeepers have rightly opined that it is more dangerous to be a woman in war now than it is to be an armed soldier.

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Acid Attack and Disability: An Exploration of Social Space and Discourse

Pratima Singh
Research Scholar
Department of English, Banaras Hindu University
Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh) India
monaazm2012@gmail.com

Abstract

Generally, discourses on Acid-attack survivors (a recognized disability under RPWD Act 2016) are silenced as non-textual and irrelevant. Many reasons for this collective reluctance can be attributed to the ableist ideology that is dominant in India, even today, and the country's inadequate legal system which does not deliver efficient remedies. Scholars like Shilpa Anand, Nandini Ghosh, Anita Ghai, and many others argue about the failure to understand the transition of disability in a multidimensional framework. A majority of discourses on disability in India continue to revolve around the matrix of abled/(dis)abled dichotomy. Such a restricted perception of disability systematically, epistemically, and institutionally hides the 'legal inclusion of acid attack' into disability discourse that provides a new dimension to the problem of social rehabilitation of acid attack survivors. It presents a perspective on gender-based violence in India that aims at silencing and controlling women. The paper reflects on the role of social enterprise in urban public spaces like current trends of cafés, campaigns about gender-based violence, and abuse against women. The paper also tries to look at the very recent venture that seeks to invent a new system that claims to give them a sense of identity and self-respect. The paper looks at these social spaces as a site for questioning the existing social and cultural norms in India. Interestingly, feminists have increasingly invested in legal addresses, democracy, equality, and justice through the law; but nothing with respect to disability that requires a renewed feminist emphasis on the struggle of these acid attack survivors as in India most cases are of women. The paper tries to encapsulate the changing scenario of disability studies based on case studies of these acid attack survivors and foreground the need to reconceptualize the relation between disability and gender, law, and rights.
Keywords: Acid-attack, Disability, Law, Gender, Social enterprise, Rights

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Introduction

The terms Disability and Violence are integrally linked. Many people became disabled through acts of violence. Moreover, women are more frequently became the objects of violence. To explore the nature, types and extent of violence that results in disability, one need to look at the idea of gender identity and its various connections which operate within particular political and cultural norms and are a product of patriarchy and power relations. Scholars have tried to define and differentiate between sex and gender viz sex as a biological

construction and gender as a sociocultural identity. Looking at the historiography of another form of violence- Acid Attack, I find an existing gap both in terms of representation and discussion in scholarly texts in terms of gender-based violence and as a disability in general. Referring to the condition of women Angana P. Chatterjee raises a couple of valid points about gender and sexual violence in South Asia "normalized and performed through material and symbolic acts that are carried out in regular life through the ordinary network making them 'routine violence'" (Chatterjee 24). Thus, defining gender-based violence in India is a more difficult and contentious task. Menon problematizes the universalist assumption behind the citizen subject which results in new challenges to think about social inclusion of difference. To quote Menon herself: "feminism requires us to recognize that 'women' is neither a stable nor homogenous category" (Menon 149). She further opines the idea and need about the shift from "uniform" to a "gender-just" civil code. Scholars like Francis Kuriakose et al. talking of acid violence too note that "To a certain extent, limitations in research methods, the definition of violence, sampling techniques, interviewers training and skills, and cultural differences that affect respondents' willingness to reveal intimate experiences as well as underreporting of such incidents makes direct comparisons between cultures or countries problematic" (Kuriakose et al. 67).

Acid attack is one of the recognized disabilities as per the Rights of Persons with Disability (RPWD) Act 2016. "The Bombay High Court recently held that an acid attack victim would be considered a person suffering from a 'specified disability' and therefore entitled to additional compensation, rehabilitative measures, and free medical treatment available for persons with disabilities as per the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (PWD) Act, 2016" (Indian Express, 2021). The severity of the crime was also observed in the 226th Law Commission Report:

> Victims of acid attacks suffer a great deal due to the slow judicial process, inadequate compensation, and obviously from the after-effects of the acid attack itself. Thus, there is an urgent need to legislate distinct sections in the IPC to deal with acid attacks and to set up a Criminal Injuries Compensation Board in India to deal with such cases in an effective and efficient manner, to help the victims of the acid attacks to get compensation for medical expenses and rehabilitation apart from making section 357 CrPC mandatory to certain respects. (226th Report, 21)

IPC Section 326A, Chapter XVI addresses acid attack as a criminal act, further throwing of acid on any person that causes disfigurement, deformity, or disability in any part of the body; this can be either permanent or fragmentary. In such cases, it was decided to give at least 10 years of imprisonment which may further be extended to lifetime imprisonment, and a fine payable to meet the medical expenses of the victim.

Now let's consider the term "Acid Attack" and its consequences. Would anyone ever consider an Acid attack as a crime? No matter whether the most complacent patriarch to a common civil opinion, they would consider Acid Attack as the most heinous crime. But the apparent data is fabricated. Several scholarly papers talk about the causes and impacts of acid attacks. The debate goes on about the laws dealing with the Acid attacks and several initiatives taken by UTs, States to present a right-based approach for the citizens, especially gender-based attacks on women. Schemes offered by the Indian government revolve around

compensation, medical facilities, and other rehabilitation services. The records of Urban space in India present disability and the cases of acid attacks in a new light. Michele Friedner in his essay quoting Bascom (2012) and Grace (2013) has argued that- "There is a growing body of disability studies literature that attends to a sociality and different ways of engaging social interactions as a valued way of being in the world" (Friedner 37).

Thus, following an empirical and interpretative approach to looking at the cases of acid attacks can be problematized in terms of its understanding in urban space. The changing scenario both inwardly and outwardly creates a new space for disabled people. Analyzing social space as a representational site Friedner quoting Donzelot (1984) and Ferguson (2015) has argued that "social is a relatively new category of control and organization; it has become a catchall framework in which political, economic, and moral problems are remediated through social fixes" (Friedner 38). Thus, these increasingly social sites in urban spaces in India affirm a new kind of discussion with an aim to empower and promote a more rational understanding of disability. It creates a new space of public interaction with what we call an abled community (non-disabled/ normal) and disabled people.

The Cases of Acid-attack Survivors

Rather than starting within an abstract conceptual framework, the paper looks at first-hand experiences and careful consideration in order to understand the world of acid-attack survivors and also its representation in urban space. Each of these stories follows how they negotiate within culture and society and how society understands disability.

Mere Respondent or a Representational Self? Revenge or Accident: The Case of Reshma Khatun

In Indian society, love is a man's 'honor' and the responsibility of a woman to reciprocate it. Saima Jasam (2001) explores violence against women in Pakistan with special reference to the idea of love and honor and says "It is the man who has honor and yet it is the responsibility of a woman to protect and safeguard it" (Jasam 60). One of the many causes of throwing acid on the victim is 'rejection in turn revenge'. Goswami et al. examines the causes of acid attack in India and argues that vengeance by rejected lovers in India is one of the root causes of acid attacks in India. "When a person is rejected of his marriage proposal or advances of a person are rebuffed by a woman, it is taken as a spite and out of vengeance, acid is used on the woman to teach her a lesson" (Goswami et al. 5).

Reshma Khatun, a survivor of an acid attack is from West Bengal and currently staying in Bangalore. She is 22 years old. By profession, she is a model and singer. She had lost all this world after the attack and wanted to die. As she said- I wish to die and want to blame the entire world for its violence. One day within a blink of an eye, everything turned silver-black. It was a black day in my life. Says Reshma- I was going to my work and the time was evening. On the way to my office, I realized that somebody was stalking me. As soon as I reached the market, I witnessed that there were some bikers stalking me. Before I could

understand anything, the man on the bike threw acid on my face with a target to disfigure me.

Surprisingly the perpetrator was one of his neighbors, serving in the Indian Army, and was in love with her and proposed to her for marriage. The moment she rejected his proposal as it was a one-sided love, the boy threatened her by saying- if you cannot be mine, you cannot be someone else. She concluded with the remark that after the incident she is now more ambitious as she now never cares for the world and how she looks.

Reshma is a member of *'Acid Survivors'*, an organization that works for the prevention of this atrocity and the rehabilitation of its survivors. Her undying optimism in her fight for justice for wronged innocents is one to emulate.

An Extreme Hatred or Love . . . ? The Case of Sangeeta Devi

Under the rubrics of love, the case of Sangeeta highlights the attitude of men as a result of which her dreams shattered, her hopes melted, and felt defeated. Analyzing the idea of love that circumscribes the lives of women in Indian society, one can look at this acid attack case. Progress from an extreme idea of love to losing honor because women are not supposed to say 'NO'. The objective of such an attempt to disfigure a woman can be elucidated in terms of patriarchal domination.

Sangeeta was in her 18s when she was attacked by one of the boys of the same village. While going to school every day she was stalked by a boy who used to stop her way. One day, the boy proposed to marry her. Love not being reciprocated, turned into revenge. One day, while she was working, the boy found her alone and he kept on stalking her secretly. To disfigure her, before she could say and understand anything, the boy poured acid on her face. She screamed for help; the boy left the place saying: If you cannot be mine, you cannot be someone else. How dare you complain about your uncle. . . .? It is important here to understand the deliverables, an intervention tool that doesn't simply reveals their personal tragedy but raises consciousness about their rights and further enabling them to identify violence in their lives and the use of criminal justice for redressal.

This story of abuse reveals that in India, the common motivation for acid attacks is the subordinate and vulnerable status of women. Unfortunately, it is an acknowledged fact that women are likely to face such violence and it is a crime against the honour of a man if a woman says 'no'. It was only in Delhi that Sangeeta witnessed other survivors like her sharing the same stories of jilted lovers or spurned lovers. She befriended two life-changing persons of her life- Shanno and Gulnar who were also there in the hospital for their further treatment of acid attacks. It was as Sangeeta says- Gulnaar Didi's idea to introduce her to *The Orange Café* which is a project of the *Red Brigade Trust*, opened in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, to make sure that acid attack survivors own a café and also train women in self-defense that proved to be the epitome of women's empowerment. After working at Café, she now feels somewhat independent, and happily married last year in December 2020.

The Location of Self: Beneath or Above

To look at the reason for disfigurement (mostly acid attack results in facial

disfigurement), we will have to look at the potential of beauty and due importance given to the physical appearance/perfection of people in general, and the identity of women lies in her face (to be particular). The idea of normalcy is a cultural and historical concept. It is interesting to quote what Nivedita Menon in her book *Seeing Like a Feminist (2012)* talks about:

> "Have you heard of 'nude make-up'?
> This is what it is:
> 'Nude makeup looks are all about your skin looking fresh and dewy, without looking like you are wearing make-up. All you need is eyeliner, mascara, nude lipstick, and a highlighting blush that will give your skin a natural glow.'
> The whole point of nude makeup is to spend hours painting your face to make it look like you had not touched it at all.
> The maintaining of social order is like that. It requires a faithful performance of prescribed rituals over and over again throughout one's lifetime. Complex networks of cultural reproduction are dedicated to this sole purpose" (Menon vii).

Due to this idea of 'reconstructive beauty myth' and perfection, society has invented its form of normalcy that not only judges the person called 'normal' but has just created its myth of making ordinary lives extraordinary and vice-versa.

Let us consider the viewpoint of the survivors' idea of normality and the policy and law dealing with what they call distorted identity. This resurgence of the narrative of normal has created an illusion and dilemma both in academics and in understanding disability. The uncountable medical surgeries after the attack have created an idea of normality in terms of the intervention of science. What are the reasons for looking for the idea of normality that all these survivors readily move forwards for? Why do all human rights organizations, crowdfunding sites, and NGOs ride toward reconstructive/plastic/cosmetic surgeries? It is interesting here to understand society's negotiation and how people deal with the very idea of disfigurement and disability caused by an acid attack. Interrogating the idea of disfigurement in the socio-cultural domain, the identity of a woman lies in her physical appearance before the attack. Thus, the deviation from what we call 'normal' results in exclusion, making them gruesome and thus, snatching the identity of women. It is believed that the body is the source of identity and it is the body that interacts with society. Thus, it can be considered as one of the factors behind the criminal intentionality. Moreover, in this domain, body is seen as a tool for the representation of the self. Regardless of culture, society, religion, community, and economic condition, it is an acknowledged fact that women face discrimination on account of their appearance, and in Indian society, socio-cultural taboos are associated with women and their appearance. For the scholars working on disability studies, the guiding framework is always these sociocultural imperatives that result in the marginalization of women with disability in particular and disabilities in general. The identities are distorted.

Towards Creating an Alternative Space: Representation at Urban Social Space

To broaden the intersections of disability (acid-attack) and gender based violence, and going beyond the physical and sexual aspects of it, one can look at the Urban Social Space as medium of engagement of people in different activities, interests and a place to locate their

inner and outer self. But theoretically, the social urban space may be defined as a phenomenon which has multiple dimensions. It is also important to address the role of social space within disability discourse because it offers and constructs different possibilities irrespective of a person's bodily appearance. Body is not simply understanding its socio-cultural representation, but it is more important how is it experienced and negotiated in different spaces.

Extending the perceived notion within disability studies, it is important to understand the current decade in India that is in the middle of profound changes. From urban social spaces to states, the debates on the welfare, rehabilitation, and employment of disabled people have been addressed radically. A series of initiatives have been taken mostly by activists, NGOs, Foundations, and social welfare sectors. Overall, there is rich evidence that contributes to the representation of survivors in urban spaces. To interrogate the ways in which acid attack survivors interact with society and how society understands the concerns of these people, we have varieties of addresses and questions of the survivors. Does society give survivors an equal opportunity to participate? Is employment a solution? What are the ways in which disabled people try to adjust themselves to fit into the "norms? Are these places reconstructing a myth of inclusion and a place of support? What are the ways in which they articulate the 'self' in public space? How does a body become the right body? When does a body have the right to enter public spaces? Several questions come into the discussion of disability and social space. Bringing together all the addresses, we find that urban spaces try to situate disability in a unique manner.

Until the last decade, there had never been any place for survivors where they could be employed, and society never had an open arm to welcome them. Ria Sharma, the activist, addresses the ground reality- "Today, however, these women are held in contempt and suspected of having committed a terrible transgression to have been so severely punished. Is it even possible to do anything bad enough to deserve this? The whole concept, the problem, and our understanding of it are dated. The survivors not only found it hard to get treatment after an attack, but it was also nigh impossible to fight the government for their rights to their compensation" (Sharma 68). With this very idea, a lot of foundations, NGOs, Restaurants, and vocational training centres have been opened. While taking interviews and listening to the address of the survivors, I personally found some questions haunting me. Where does one go to find some experience? Is it found in cities? Is it found in going to the market alone? Is it found in places where everyone else can go except 'the survivors?

There is always a stigma attached which creates otherness, the real experience of life lies in the everyday activities we perform without being questioned, not being felt awkward, and not having any continuous stares from people. I want to market too, I want to see the world, and I want to be independent. I don't like being at home because everyone questions me as if I can't do anything in life, said Sangeeta, the survivor at The Orange Café. Another survivor complains that before being in such a public space, her own reflection used to scare her and she felt afraid. Across the city and country, we encounter disabled people abandoned by their own families, denied access to social space, and denied basic needs, no right to education. "They spend their entire lives thinking of themselves as wretched and

worthless, burdens on their families, and the cause of pain, suffering, and humiliation for their families in society" (Mahanta 49). Instrumental in interrogating the social space, one can understand it as a catalyst for the empowerment of acid attack survivors and disabilities. With a systematic understanding of the phenomenon that social spaces undertake, we find that it can be marked by an 'ideological shift'. Within the broader socio-historical context, the urban social spaces claim to bring a changed consciousness

The founder of the organization 'Make Love Not Scars', Ria Sharma, in her book *Make Love Not Scars: A Story of Fighting Back and Winning (2019)* focuses on the gruesome realities of the acid attack survivors. Talking about the relationship between patriarchy and women she writes:

> Our women are frequently judged purely on the basis of their appearance. When a woman exercises her right to say 'no', she is brutally disfigured because 'if he can't have her, none else can.' This notion in itself says much more about the society we live in and less about the attacker. The fact that the attacker believes that if he disfigures a woman, she will no longer be accepted, it is a massive failure on our part. (Sharma 68)

It is worth mentioning here that in India, women are measured by their physical appearance. The cause of the problem is related to our understanding. Thus, the developments in urban social space are predicated on the idea- "There is no reason for the survivors to hide behind their veils, their face is not their shame. No face ever is" (Sharma 69). From sensitizing and awareness to bringing a change in society, the urban public space aims to redefine the understanding of disability. Another, important intervention is *The Orange Café* is a project of the *Red Brigade Trust*, opened on 14th February 2019 in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, to offer employment opportunities to the survivors, and the café is entirely managed by Acid attack survivors. In an interview with Mr. Ajay, the CEO of the café said that disability and disfigurement are still stigmas in our Indian society. Acid attacks result in facial disfigurement and society never accepts them as part of the mainstream. To bring some positive change in society, we need to empower them emotionally, psychologically, and financially.

'Make Love Not Scars' (New Delhi), 'Sheroes Hangout' (Lucknow, Agra, Noida), and 'The Orange Café' (Varanasi) are some social enterprises that provide a space to connect with society and create a network among survivors. These social enterprises are managed and operated by the survivors, notably offering vocational training, and engaging them in different activities. In practice, the founders of these cafés realized that it is essential for society to understand the extra burden on the survivors. Mere rehabilitation will not bring any change in society.

Creating an alternative map, of the urban space gives them a voice to denounce the attack. Most of the survivors who are working are from rural backgrounds and from lower-middle-class families. We might also remark on the fact that, in India, there has been no consistent and organized idea that ever existed and marked a key shift. A debate among feminists arises from the complicated notion of gender to the idea of marginalization that goes to counter the normative values. Refocusing this paradigm shift within the purview of gendered notion of disability, we can engage and respond intellectually to the ongoing efforts of these urban social spaces. Likewise, looking at the responses given by the survivors, we find that they somewhat started to gain recognition collectively as a citizen. Prioritizing the

idea of citizenship, they claim to have a renewed understanding of their rights.

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A Thousand Splendid Suns as a Conundrum of Exploitation and Displacement for War Affected Females

Vandna Mittal
Research Scholar
Department of English
Chandigarh University
Gharuan, Mohali (Punjab) India
vihaansaima@gmail.com

Dr. Harpreet Kaur
Associate Professor
Department of English
Chandigarh University
Gharuan, Mohali (Punjab) India
hapreettoor.uila@cumail.in

Abstract

Wars are meant for proving supremacy over rival forces and nations. Literature and wars are as inseparable as two sides of a coin. Right from the ninth century's 'Iliad' till today, wars have contributed a lot in literature from time to time. The major aspect of war that intersects literature is displacement. This displacement brings insecurity, lack of belongingness, and Diaspora and ultimately attacks one's self-identity. People who get affected by war are the ones who do not trust anyone easily. A Thousand Splendid Suns *is a postcolonial text. The key notion of this novel is the exploitation of women and their lack of belongingness which gives birth to an identity crisis. There is male domination and women's oppression throughout the novel which speculate such a gut wrenching story. Where on one hand, the Taliban war plays its part and leaves a void in the life of Mariam; on the other hand, it deals with the lives of women like Laila and Mariam who are totally living at the mercy of their male counterparts. Mariam is an unwanted character who has the scar of being an illegitimate daughter on her forehead throughout her life which she finally erases with the blood of someone close to her, thus giving herself a genuine reason to suffer.*
Keywords: Exploitation of Women, Taliban War, Identity Crisis, War and Displacement, Khaled Hosseini, Subjugation of Women, Quest for Identity

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Introduction

Khaled Hosseini's novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) depicts the plight of exploitation and displacement due to war which is borne by the women characters in the novel. There are different perspectives to this: one is from the point of view of Mariam, the

protagonist of the novel and the other is from the reader's point of view, which sees Mariam, not as an individual but a type. She is one of those numerous women who are exploited and tortured both inside the household as well as outside. They have no free will at all. They have to live according to their male relatives- father, brother, husband, and even son.

This novel depicts the life of an Afghan woman who is living amidst the Taliban regime and is doubly tortured and doubly marginalized for being an illegitimate child—a *haraami*. The life condition of such women is miserable. Before the Taliban overtook Afghanistan, women were at least not bound to cover their faces, give up education, or other common rights of equality. After the Taliban attack, the situation of women has become pathetic to such an extent that they can't even seek any medical help for their delivery. There is an incident in the novel where a woman is giving birth to a child through caesarean without anaesthesia. This episode sends a chill down our spine. One can hardly imagine the height of pain and suffering in such a miserable condition.

The present research presents the content analysis of a single novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini. The contents of this novel bring female characters to the scene that has been pushed in the group of the subaltern. The analysis of the selected text is connected to the behaviours of the patriarchal society which the female characters endure throughout their lives. The research mainly focuses on three female characters Nana, Mariam and Laila, and their attitudes towards the male-dominated society which makes them subalterns. Inflexible and rigid traditional beliefs and religious stereotypes have resulted in the poor status of women in such countries where there is only male hegemony and females are totally sidelined.

Review of Literature

This research paper aims to highlight the impact of displacement on the psychological development of characters. It also seeks to prove the need to study feminist texts through the lens of religious taboos, social barriers and other stereotypical contexts due to which females suffer at the hands of their societal Gods. To support my opinion, some research work relevant to the topic has been analysed and the findings as well as gaps are mentioned here.

Muhammad, Imran (2017) in the research paper "Courageous Women: A Study of Resilience of Women in Khaled Hosseini's novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*" expressed and elaborated on Hosseini's daring effort to highlight and acknowledge the marginalization and subjugation of women in patriarchal society especially in Afghanistan. The way women are treated as objects for producing babies and their basic rights are totally sidelined in this novel. The role of displacement is left unnoticed by the scholar.

Similarly Yasin, Ghulam (2021) in his paper "Endurance of the Subaltern" on *A Thousand Splendid Suns* aims to explore the oppressed and marginalized Afghan women who are made subaltern socially and religiously. They can't even ask for their basic right to live. Their only fault is that they are females. They can't oppose anything. However, there is no mention of the psychological torture borne by women in such a terrific situation.

Moghadam, V. M. (1992) in "Patriarchy and the Politics of Gender in Modernising

Societies: Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan" talked about gender equality in higher education institutions and diminishing the influence of patriarchal and conservative mind-set. . Women are victimized in emotional tortures and domestic violence and they can't even oppose it. This novel, thus, is a dedication to all those women who are fighting an unsung battle against unknown enemies and adversaries every day. This paper lacks the aspect of displacement in its explanation and the impact of displacement upon individuals.

Shayan, Zafar (2015) in "Gender Inequality in Education in Afghanistan: Access and Barriers" raises the issue of gender-biased Afghan society where the entire society is dependent upon being male or female. What seems right on being a male suddenly reverses its course of action when done by a female be it education, love marriage, job, or basic human rights. This research could not focus much on the role of war in such a disturbed society which adds more to the misery of common men.

Quest for Self-Identity

Hosseini presents a vivid picture of a Taliban lead Afghanistan where girls of young age could be given in marriage to men much older than them; where education is considered as a curse and a way to hell; where a *haraami* child-like Mariam has no free will at all, where Jalil can keep three wives at a time but a young girl Laila can't even think of marrying a young man of her age, to whom she loves. The pang of women like Mariam and Laila is not the only area of interest for Hosseini. He even puts equal emphasis on the war-torn Afghan society. There are incidents in the novel where Tariq's body is mutilated during a bomb blast, mosques are bombarded and thus, giving people a reason to grow sceptic of the existence of God. If God cannot save his own home from turning into rubble, how could one rely upon Him for one's security and safety?

If we look at the larger scenario, we find that the protagonist has been made to feel unwanted and unattended everywhere she goes. First, she is treated as an illegitimate and unwanted child by her mother Nana and her father Jalil. Her childlike innocence doesn't let her differentiate between what is right and what is wrong. Mesmerized by her rich father Jalil and in a temptation to meet him, she travels alone to the city of Herat and on reaching her father's massive house; she is denied entry by his three legitimate wives and eight legitimate children. Her mother had once told her that if she will not act according to her will and would go to meet her father, she would kill herself. Jalil sends his driver to drop Mariam home but there, her mother is found hanging from a tree. This episode of Nana's suicide becomes Mariam's guilt for a lifetime and till the end, she can't get over it. ". . . Mariam can hear Nana's last words, "I'll die if you go. I'll just die." (Hosseini 36)

This is significant because Nana later commits suicide. This incident keeps haunting Mariam throughout her life. She considers herself responsible for the death of her mother. But she has now no alternative to undo what has already been done. So, this guilt is her only companion in all her thick and thin. Rest of the people, incidents, joys and sorrows come and go but this particular guilt remains in her heart as a burden till her death, ". . . Mariam had entered this world a *haraami*, a weed, but she is leaving it a woman who had loved and has been loved back." (Hosseini 349). This is a legitimate end to an illegitimate beginning.

A Conundrum of Exploitation

After her mother's suicide, Mariam is halfheartedly taken by Jalil to his bungalow where she is not at all welcome. His wives consider her a burden imposed upon them. As long as she stays there, no one talks to her properly, not even her siblings. Their desperation to get rid of her is more evident when they find a suitor thirty years older than Mariam and this is his second marriage. She looks hopelessly toward Jalil but he is totally tongue-tied and gives silent consent to this mismatched marriage. Mariam falls apart and there is no one to share her grief. At last, she has no option but to bow before her cruel destiny. Rasheed takes her to Deh-Mazang, quite far from her father's Herat city and she leaves her hometown with a heavy heart. While leaving, her heart-rending voice melts Jalil when she says, "...I used to worship you...On Thursdays; I sat for hours waiting for you... I thought about you all the time... I didn't know you were ashamed of me."(Hosseini 50). These are Mariam's last words to her father. After this episode, she boards the bus to Deh Mazang and she never returns. In the meantime, Jalil too dies and the father-daughter duo separates forever.

The key notion of this text is the exploitation of women and their lack of belongingness which gives birth to their identity crisis. There is male dominance throughout the novel and females are living with their lips sealed. The males enjoy supremacy and superiority over females and are the masters of their fates. At one instance, when Mariam gets a brutal beating by Rashid and she tries to run away, Rasheed says:

> . . . you try this again and I will find you. I swear on the Prophet's name that I will find you. And if I do, there isn't a court in this godforsaken country that will hold me accountable for what I still do. To Mariam first, then to her, and you last. I'll make you watch. You understand me? I'll make you watch. (Hosseini 243).

Subaltern- No Voice of their Own

It takes Mariam a while but after being mistreated frequently by Jalil's wives and children, she finally realizes that she doesn't belong in her father's house. She could not find any solace anywhere. Jalil's wives want to get rid of her as soon as possible. So, she is given in marriage to Rasheed and again, she is displaced, this time from her father's hometown to Kabul, Afghanistan. Munazza Yaqoob (2018) in "Narratives of Confession: Religion and Patriarchy in the Fiction of Shahrazad and Hosseini" examines the text *A Thousand Splendid Suns* as a narrative of confession and injustice committed in the name of religion. Men are given extra liberty and in compensation, women are denied basic rights probably to maintain the balance. Rasheed is a typical male-dominant person who forces Mariam to wear *burkha* although she is not comfortable with it.

> The padded headpiece felt tight and heavy on her skull . . . and she did not like the suffocating way the pleated cloth kept pressing against her mouth. (Hosseini 7)

Their mobility and communication with society were also almost forbidding. Rasheed warned Mariam, "that she was not to come down until the visitors had left" (Hosseini 80).

The women are marginalized inside the houses and are not allowed to go outside with

their men or without their permission, "You will stay inside your homes at all times. It is not proper for women to wander about the streets" (Hosseini 271). Further, they are subaltern based on their gender and body structure, a young man describes the difference in these words, "God has made us differently, you women and us men. Our brains are different. You are not able to think we can" (Hosseini 355). This sort of marginalization creates the image of how women become subalterns and how they are further exploited by their men.

When one feels one belongs to a certain place, one feels safe and secure, but when one is displaced, the fight between one's head and heart keeps going because it is the lack of belongingness which makes us out of place, out of order of our normal behavior. Rashid often takes Mariam out to stroll in nearby market place and restaurants. She wonders at people's behavior there and how they live so differently over there. She has never been to a restaurant so far so it sounded quite weird to her to eat in front of so many people. Similarly, when Rashid takes her forcefully as his wife, she has no shoulder to cry upon. Her pain and suffering are unbearable yet she is expected to pat dry her tears and behave in a normal way. There comes a line in the novel where Mariam's mother Nana tells her the stark nude reality of life: "Like a compass needle that points north, a man's accusing finger always finds a woman." (Hosseini 7).

She tries to update herself quietly with her new surroundings. Yet her efforts go in vain and she has to bear the anguish of Rasheed frequently. As soon as Rasheed realizes that Mariam is unable to bear him a son, his anger knows no leaps and bounds and he starts releasing his frustration upon her randomly

> . . . Soon, Rasheed returns with a handful of pebbles and forces Mariam's mouth open and stuffs them in. He then orders her to chew the pebbles. In her fear, she does as he asks, breaking the molars in the back of her mouth. He tells her, 'Now you know what your rice tastes like. Now you know what you've given me in this marriage. Bad food, and nothing else. (Hosseini 94)

This shows that Mariam's inability to give Rasheed a son will continue to make him more and more bitter towards her and her troubles are going to increase in the future. The root cause of all her suffering is that she does not belong to that land. She has nobody to take her to stand, nobody to care for her, nobody to check whether she is fine or not. All this is well known to Rasheed and he takes full advantage of Mariam's lack of belongingness.

From Submissive to Bold- A Paradigm Shift

Ever since the novel begins, we find Mariam as a submissive, calm and voiceless character. Her inferiority complex is because of multiple reasons- the main reason is her being an illegitimate child. Such children are never accepted by society. Another factor of her inconsequential personality is her feeble physique. She seems like not being fed properly ever since her birth probably because her mother can't afford it or she doesn't really bother her well-being because of her faulty birth. Other female characters are also represented as voiceless, enduring and submissive as righty quoted by Yaqoob, "these women are like domestic animals, kept and confined within a domestic sphere for the service and pleasure of men." (Yaqoob 8)

In the beginning, when they are newlywed, Mariam is totally dependent upon Rasheed for all her needs and day-to-day activities. She had never come out of the small town of Heart ever in her life, and here, she is suddenly sent to Kabul after marriage to a way too old man- Rasheedd This makes him more adamant and cruel and he considers Mariam object of his comfort and not a human being. For him, Mariam is his legally wedded wife whom he can keep any way he likes. In order to take revenge on her for not giving him a legal heir, he beats her brutally, locks her up, and starves her all day long. Mariam has to tolerate all this because she has no backing. Nobody is there to bother her, nor does it affect anyone to pay the slightest worry to her poor condition. Hence, she becomes stone-hearted, so much so that when Rashid brings Laila as his new wife into the same house where Mariam is living, she remains silent and compromises with her destiny without complaining.

Rebecca A. Stuhr (2011) in "*A Thousand Splendid Suns*: Sanctuary and Resistance" portrays Hosseini's women, much like the country of Afghanistan itself, appear to be propelled by the whims of outside forces, familial and societal, with little chance of influencing their own lives and futures. Mariam's life changes drastically after getting married to Rasheed, and this change is not really a pleasant one. She bears new tortures and faces new challenges every day in this unknown city of Kabul. With no kin or family member around, Mariam becomes whimsical and submissive. With every beating she receives from Rasheed, she gets more used to bear his wrath. All these incidents are beautifully explained by Hosseini in the current novel.

Mariam has always been a subaltern; portrayed as weak, submissive, voiceless, and enduring. Now she is fed up with her ignorance, and wants to attain the identity of a savior even if it costs her own life. Moreover, she finds it to give strength to herself when Laila needs love and help. Laila sees Mariam as her rescue, her savior from Rasheed. This is why when at the end of the novel Mariam kills Rasheed in order to save Laila from his grip, she deliberately calls his name so that he could see her face and Mariam finds pleasure when she sees death and fear in Rasheed's eyes."… Mariam tightened her grip around the shovel's handle. She raised it. She said his name. She wanted him to see. Rasheed!" (Hosseini 310). She hits the shovel forcefully against his temple and this assault is the bursting of her repressed life.

Conclusion

The entire course of action of the novel revolves around Mariam, Laila and other women living in Taliban lead Afghanistan. Hosseini has tried to present the pang and suffering of war-affected females in the best possible way. Yet there are other issues such as children who suffer at the hands of the power holders of Taliban society, stereotypical religious and cultural practices, oppression of the marginalized sections of society and the impact of war upon any society and its functioning. People are what they are because they are made to behave the way they behave. Their identity is a social construct and not an independent process. Especially the male characters' social situations made them prone to violence, lust, domination and suppression of their female counterparts. The only way out is healthy debates, discussions and open group chats to clear the fog of orthodox mentality out of one's mind.

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Gender and Trauma: A Study of Feroze Rather's *The Night of Broken Glass* and Shahnaz Bashir's *Half Mother*

Rameez Raja
Research scholar
Department of English
Chandigarh University
Gharuan, Mohali (Punjab) India
rameezmalik7666@gmail.com

Dr. Tania Bansal
Assistant Professor
University Institute of Liberal Arts and Humanities
Chandigarh University
Gharuan, Mohali (Punjab) India
tania.e10426@cumail.in

Abstract

Trauma studies sprang to popularity after World War II, when the world first realised how war, shock, and trauma shattered the collective memories of those who endured it. This paper would look at the experience of trauma as experienced by the general populace living under the shadow of Kashmir conflict especially the marginalised section namely - the women. Kashmiri authors, Feroz Rather in The Night of Broken Glass and Shahnaz Bashir in The Half Mother explore this theme apart from many others. Literature is a philosophical journey into the complexities of the collective unconscious and how it works. Women are the muted and the most affected section, the quietest. Their side of the story remains to be heard. This paper would explore the same through the theoretical framework of trauma studies as propounded by Cathy Caruth. It would also imply the psychoanalytical framework as proposed by Sigmund Freud.
Keywords: Trauma, Psychology, Kashmir Conflict, Women

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Introduction

As a result of a series of dreadful events like wars, riots, droughts, terrorist attacks, etc that have occurred throughout human history, conflict and trauma have intensified and grown through times. Even after an overwhelmingly traumatic event is over, the influence of it on human brain lasts considerably longer than the event itself. Victims who witness a traumatic event have suffered a wide range of psychological and physical trauma, which has been powerfully described in twentieth and twenty-first-century fiction writers' works. Conflicts, wars, and skirmishes take a toll on the lives of those who live amidst them. Everyone who lives in a conflict zone suffers, but the marginalised sections - especially women, suffer the most. This is especially true in the demography of Kashmir, where women suffer and continue to do in today's time and are being driven to the margins with every passing day.

Women in every crisis are exposed to different abuses and physical violence, and women in Kashmir are no exception. They have become vulnerable as a result of the unending conflict in the valley. Kashmiri women have taken up the increased obligation of working both within and outside the confinement of the four walls. They have risen to prominence because of the absence of their kids, husbands, fathers, and brothers as a result of the war-torn environment in Kashmir.

During the armed conflict in Kashmir in the late 1980s, women gradually filled the void left by the absence of male members of society. Though societal duties existed before 1990s, the beginning of armed insurgency has presented women with a new difficulty. Women's economic troubles have arisen as a result of the enforced disappearances, as in traditional societies, males have been the primary breadwinners and in their absence women were unable to inherit property or make bank transfers because death certificates were necessary. It was impossible for half-widows since no one knew if their husbands were alive or not.

Discussion

The protracted conflict in the valley of Kashmir has been portrayed in the Anglophone literature written about Kashmir. The two texts, *Half Mother* by Shahnaz Bashir and *The Night of Broken Glass* by Feroze Rather taken in this study incorporate the elements of devastation and tumult caused by conflict and its psychological effect on the natives of Kashmir especially - the women. The conflict in Kashmir has resulted in a wide range of feelings, including post-traumatic stress disorder, despair, anxiety, and many more. Hundreds of thousands of people have been killed, hundreds of thousands have gone missing, and many have been maimed and horribly tortured. Citizens' life has been made extremely difficult by cross-firing, curfews, and periodic internet blockades. This had a significant traumatic impact on the entire population and in particular, on the lives of women who were subjected to it. Despite the fact that women are not active participants in the fight, they have been exposed to molestation, violence, and even imprisonment. They are prone to high levels of worry, sadness, miscarriage, and abortion among many other things.

These are particularly frequent among Kashmiri women as depicted by the novelists in the two novels taken for study. For far too long, women have been suffering from the effects of patriarchal culture but with the onset of armed insurgency, the situation got exacerbated. Now, due to prevailing violence and bloodshed a mother weeps for her deceased son someplace, a sister sheds tears quietly for her dead brother, and a brother endures the grief of his dead brother silently reverberating and finding their place in Kashmiri literature. They run pillar to post just to find traces of their missing husbands or sons, and they must also bear the burden of patriarchal society's honour and dignity. There is now constant psychological suffering in their life.

Theoretical Framework

This is a qualitative research project that focuses on a textual examination of a literary piece. The theoretical framework proposed by Cathy Caruth in trauma studies will be followed in this article. Trauma can be defined as “stress or blow that may produce disordered feelings or behaviour" to a "state or condition produced by such a stress or blow" (Erikson 184). Trauma, according to Caruth, is any experience that is out of the ordinary. It sends shivers up the spines of those who have experienced it. Trauma, according to Caruth, manifests itself not immediately after it occurs, but it recurs. Caruth proposes a paradigm for

interpreting history that is based on delayed reactions and other intrusive phenomena, rather than linear empiricism. Caruth believes that literature may be used to trace trauma. A human being, according to Freud, is the culmination of his prior experiences. Between the exterior traumatic experience and the actor's internal traumatic response, the psychoanalytic model depicts the actor's unconscious emotional worries and cognitively distorted psychological defence (Alexander et al. 5). The significance of memory is revealed by the psychoanalytic element of trauma, which insists on working backward on the symbolic residue that is left on recalling events.

Trauma and Literature

No historical or other narrative can reach the wounded psyche as effectively as literary texts in remembering and understanding a particular conflict. Literature and traumatic events are closely intertwined since the very beginning of textual representation. Literature depicts the innermost heart of human existence, including its sufferings and joys, by delving deeply into the human psyche. This is one of the primary reasons why literary discourses are more effective in depicting conflicts than historical ones. This is especially true in the literature on Kashmir conflict. Anglo-phone Kashmiri literature is overly conflict-ridden. It is best described as writing that transmits aggressiveness and rage because of the Anglo-phone Kashmiri literature's obsession with the theme of violence and bloodshed. To communicate their story, Kashmir's indigenous fiction authors opt to write in English to appeal to a worldwide audience. The subject of trauma and violence runs across the texts taken in this research work.

Half Mother and Women

The Half Mother is a novel by Shahnaz Bashir. He recounts the account of suffering and pain of the people living in the war zone day in and day out in his work. It portrays a dark narrative about women who encounter tragedy on a daily basis. Since the beginning of militancy in the valley, compulsion has cut the women's entire lives into halves. There are half-mothers, half-widows, and half-sisters who are desperate to learn more about their mysteriously vanished relatives. Apart from the social and economic concerns, their mental health is in shambles. It's paradoxical that paradise is surrounded by sobbing ladies, armed troops, and terrorists. For women who have experienced a significant loss, it is an endless cycle. The persecution that women endure in the conflict-torn area is undeniable and its repercussions are complex, affecting future generations as well as nature. Women in these areas face a wide range of sufferings and they are tormented both privately and publicly. They endure the gravity of dreadful challenges and sufferings by experiencing tremendous adversities, which results in fragmented brains and, as a result, psychological turmoil. 'Traumatic neurosis' becomes an unavoidable aspect of their existence, and they must learn to live with it.

The narrative begins with a reverie that brings out opposing components of suffering-hope, misery-patience, and uncertainty-quest into her head in such a way that the nostalgic impulses connect with the current consciousness in a sneaky manner, only to worsen her melancholic inclinations. Haleema, the novel's protagonist, has witnessed the worst of the worst since she was young. Her difficulties began when she was quite young. To begin with, her mother dies while she is just eight years old. Due to financial constraints, she is forced to discontinue her education in the middle. She marries a medical assistant and divorces three

months later when her husband had an affair with a nurse. After her divorce, she is forced to support herself.

She was, however, expecting her son, whom she would later deliver into the world - Imran. She is left alone in pursuit of her academic aspirations without any emotional support from any of her relatives or close friends. Imran is a bright young man with a desire for achievement, but when he is confronted with the harsh facts of life, he feels hopeless and forlorn. Once, there was an attack in a nearby location known as Natipora, where there were confrontations between terrorists and military forces, and massive gunfire and shelling began. Therefore, a number of civilians, including Imran's maternal grandpa, dies. Imran and his mother suffer a catastrophe. Imran has also been put into prison by the military. Haleema, Imran's mother, looked everywhere for him but couldn't find him. When she returns and there is no whereabouts about Imran, Haleema does not stop. In an effort to find Imran again, she wanders about, runs, walks, plays, and lives. Amidst this psychological ambivalence, she relies on 'hopes'. Then one day she looks in the mirror and realises that time has gone, and she is growing older: "Imran hasn't returned; perhaps he never will; maybe life was just a dream; probably it's not her life but nightmares she could never have imagined when Imran's new-born chatter had made her smile" (Bashir 114).

Having been born and raised in a dangerous atmosphere of strife and bloodshed she cares for Imran like a bereft woman without a man would leave no stone unturned in her efforts to inculcate fatherly love and motherly care in him. Haleema hoped against hope and imagined endless visions of an unattainable future during Imran's formative years. But fate has other plans for her, first, she loses Ab Jaan to the troops' angry gunshots, and when she attempts to restore her composure and collects the will to fight against the odds, her son vanishes in front of her, into the mists of clouds that loomed so large. She is traumatised, her psyche is permanently damaged by this traumatic experience and, as a result, carries the history of the battle that has left the lives of women and other people bleak and reduced them to the size of a log of wood. Trauma as per Cathy Caruth recurs every now and then, it holds true in case of Haleema whose first terrible encounter occurs when she witnesses her father being paraded and assaulted by security forces. It has an everlasting effect on her psyche. It reappears later in her life. The ghost-like presence of trauma in her psyche becomes ubiquitous.

The novel *Half Mother* is full of female characters who have experienced tragedy. With bated breath Kashmiri daughters, wives, and mothers await the return of their loved ones taken by military forces. The novel also mirrors the anguish and suffering endured by Kashmiri women as a result of the conflict that is exacerbating. By having a female protagonist in the work, Shahnaz Bashir hopes to depict the inexhaustible sorrows and pangs that women face due to the conflict. As a result, Haleema, the novel's principal character, becomes a cliché for women in struggle who must face a myriad of hardships in order to keep the wheels of daily life turning. Her trauma is a trauma of every woman in Kashmir. Whether it's her sleeplessness or the haunting memories of war, everything adds to her trauma: "Haleema couldn't sleep that night, eagerly waiting for the dawn. Sleepless and she went out and sat on the veranda" (Bashir 77).

The psychological trauma she had undergone damages her-self by acting like a tumour in consciousness. Her frustration is at an all-time high as a result of her fruitless frantic hunt for her missing kid. Her rage is at an all-time high due to her ceaseless pursuit of her missing son. She visits every agency he could find, but she couldn't find any information on her missing kid. She once seizes a pistol from a security guard at an SSP office entrance and demands that the guard shoot her. Every witness is taken aback by her, yet her anguish rages through her veins. Her optimism gives way to pessimism. The only hope for her now is the

return of her son Imran. Haleema stands in for collective pain. She serves as a medium for the author to illustrate the cultural trauma experienced by those who live in the shadow of violence. Her memories, which are tainted with psychological traumas, represents the communal memory of conflict-affected Kashmiris suffering.

She's practically dead fatigued at this point. Her youth is gradually giving way to senility. She has been severely traumatised and exhausted to the extreme, having spent her whole childhood in a frenzied hunt for her missing son and lamenting the death of her close and dear ones who are being consumed by the strife in Kashmir. She struggles with memories and also with sleep. Her face, once youthful and wrinkled, now sags and bears witness to her agonising sufferings and anguish, "She has grown habitually insomniac now. Dark brown patches had developed under her eyes. Incipient wrinkles criss-crossed her face, while her cheeks had begun to sunk" (Bashir 84). Haleema represents many women of Kashmir who undergo a permanent identity crisis brought on by pain and anguish by an outside factor that alters the mind on the inside.

The Night of Broken Glass and Women

The Night of Broken Glass is a gripping story of tragedy, love, traumatic experiences and retribution set against the backdrop of Kashmir conflict. The novel was released in 2018. The novel uses several interconnected narratives to depict the terrifying circumstances brought on by the advent of armed insurgency. It illustrates the brutality and misery inflicted on valley dwellers by armed insurgency. In the first narrative, *The Old Guy in The Cottage*, a man tortured by one inspector Masoodi, is hired as a working boy in the now-retired inspector's house. He gets excited about killing him now. Inspector Masoodi is on the verge of death, and the lad who has been hired to look after him is torn between letting him die naturally and killing him with his axe. He develops a lifelong hatred for inspector Masoodi ,as a result of the severe experiences he endures while being tortured by him. The traumatic experience alters the identity of this young boy, and now, rather than being motivated by sanity, he is driven by wrath. Another narrative, *The Souvenir* is a first-person account of a high school student named Tariq who recalls his terrifying encounters with the military, including being ordered to shoot a bullet by the army.

Women are trapped by the tangle of home duties in almost every third-world nation. Women oversee everything, whether it's putting the house together or doing the chores. They lose out on a lot since they are confined to the house. The patriarchal character of that particular family or society at large is mostly to blame for women being trapped in household tasks and missing out on other endeavours or opportunities available in the world. This can be seen in the character of Maryam. Maryam has been handling the household affairs admirably since her parents' divorce. She takes utmost care of her father which can be shown as: "Maryam planted him on the bed with two mattresses in the sitting room by the kitchen and wrapped him into two blankets and a thick woollen quilt" (Rather 17).

Not only does she operate the house, but she also performs other jobs like embroidering garments to supplement the family's income, which is insufficient due to her father's meagre pension. "She would rise early and spend the mornings making Venetian of leaves - elms, almond, walnut, cherry, and willow- around the necklines, down the fronts, and around hemlines and border of the sleeves of the Pherans" (Rather 18). Females are unable to find work and must rely on menial labour to make ends meet. While men can do any job, women are responsible for running their households and caring for their elderly relatives. This is portrayed as below:

> While I was in college, I realised that my father was growing old. I began to worry about my future, and I taught myself to do embroidery work. In my aunt's house, on the southern shore of the lake, I sat for hours on end with a bunch of girls, poor girls, who could not afford school, with lovely people spread across their laps. They worked diligently with sharp needles which sometimes pricked their fingertips, drawing blood. Nevertheless, they persevered; they stitched and embroidered. I too sat with them and learned their craft. And it took me hours to create my first almond leaf and several hours of patient application to bestow its venations (Rather 24).

The harassment of women is also mentioned in the novel. When Nuzhat, a Zoology student, enters a bus, a young guy and then a horrible middle-aged man sexually assault her, leaving her with lifelong trauma and rendering her unable to board any buses in the foreseeable future. In patriarchal countries, women have virtually little say in selecting their own fate. Shireen Qadar, a woman, wishes to meet her lover Ahanger. She's been imprisoned in a four-walled room. The psychological effects of an unrepresentable and unknowable terrible experience on her is beyond words and seems inexpressible. With constant surveillance and gaze, Shireen goes hysterical. She was being pushed to the point where she couldn't go any farther. The relentless assimilation and repression has utterly sickened her, and one day, "a few months later, the news came in hushed whispers that Shireen who had only feigned convalescence had killed herself by drinking a bottle of a rat poison on the eve of her wedding" (Rather 71)

The loss of their family shatters and destroys the psyche of women in battle. The collective cultural experiences of weaker groups are not sufficiently portrayed in prevailing narratives. The fiction about Kashmir attempts to present the unrepresentable traumatic experiences of weaker groups like women. The conflict in Kashmir has riven people's lives apart. Women who lose their spouses or fiancés in the fight become widows and are left in wails, patiently waiting for their silent death with obtuse wailing day after day. The living died as a result of the battle. In the case of Maryam, she has lost her fiancé to the conflict. In Maryam's case, the argument led to the death of her fiancé, who was shot at by the military in the middle of the night. Maryam lives bereaved because of this. She wailes beholding the dead corpse of the dead Iqbal:

> She was crying quietly but when the casket arrived floating on the shoulder of the mourners, each one of them reciting, La ilaha illa Allah, La ilaha Illa Allah, Maryam broke a safer grip. She beat her forehead and pulled out her hair, tearing the dawn with her screams. Maine mahzaro, Maine mahzaro, my bridegroom, my bridegroom. (Rather 35).

Conclusion

History repeats itself. Today we see an ever-growing need to keep such dialogues and discussions open in the media – print and visual, fiction and nonfiction, etc. so as to learn from the past and improve our future. Women and children have always been the marginalised sections and least heard of. Though a lot of initiations are taken up academically and otherwise for women's upliftment with an exponential proliferation in women-oriented TV series yet more is desired. More is less. Women in Kashmir are doubly tortured. One, at the hands of patriarchy, and second, the State Apparatuses as we see depicted in the novels of study. The story of Kashmir by indigenous Kashmiri writers highlights the sorrows and struggles that women face on a daily basis. As a result, it may seem more reasonable to declare that literature exemplifies coping with the experience of trauma that survivors endure on battlefields or in combat zones across the world. Because trauma reflects the agony, shock,

and suffering of the mind, so does literature, which is essentially a record or retelling of the workings of the unconscious. As a result, Shahnaz Bashir and Feroze Rather depict perfectly the sorrow, misfortunes, and pain of those who face horrific events in their lives.

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Traces of Latent Feminism in Mainstream Bollywood Cinema: A Retrospective Study of the 'New Women' in Bollywood

Abhishikta Bhattacharjee
Assistant Professor
Institute of Engineering and Management
Kolkata (West Bengal) India
abhishikta.bhattacharjee@iemcal.com

Abstract

Indian Cinema, since its inception has always harped on the theme of virile masculinity of its heroes and the distress and vulnerability of its heroines. Women in Commercial Indian Cinema have always been portrayed as a damsel in distress, guarded by her lord from all aspects. These representations have been inspired to a large extent by religion and mythology. The women characters are mostly endowed with Sita-like qualities, they are the epitome of virtue and values; always remain chaste and flawless but lack agency and choice. The heroines act from the margins where heroes reside at the centre. On the contrary, there are films which do not conform to these set patterns. This paper tries to uphold some imprints of feminism in commercial cinema with a detailed analysis of movies like 'Paheli', 'Fiza' and 'Manmarziyaan' where women and men coexist and complement each other; where women characters are not created to be guarded by men and they do not remain under the pall of societal stereotypes, rather they have the agency to exercise their will.
Keywords: Indian Cinema, Latent Feminism, New Women, Bollywood, Patriarchy

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Introduction

The paper is a conscious attempt to introspect representation of women within popular or commercial cinema by exploring the roles women usually play in some commercial movies. The representation of women in Commercial Indian Cinema follows a unified mode and its impact on society is also manifold. The other forms of cinema try their best to represent women as equal half of the mainstream society but it is all the more important to implicate the same significance of women in popular cinema as Sowmya Nandkumar writes in his MA thesis titled "The Stereotypical Portrayal of Women in Commercial Indian Cinema" (2011)

> Since a large population watches Bollywood films, Bollywood cinema is a powerful mass medium of communication in India, and cinematic portrayals definitely are highly impressionistic. (7)

Women characters in popular Hindi cinema are mostly devoid of reality; they cater to the unrealistic standards of beauty and play the roles of an ideal daughter, sister and wife. Laura Mulvey suggests in her *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* that male characters are the drivers of the plot and women are driven by them. The loyalty and dedication of women

characters towards their husbands are actually a constant perpetuation of patriarchy through the medium of visual art (89). Therefore, the research tries to annihilate the unchangeable and the inevitable gendered role of women in commercial cinema by reconceptualising the image of women through some select commercial movies.

Bollywood as a Repository of Popular Culture and Stereotypes

At the onset of 2020, we had a film like *Kabir Singh*, which thrives on the notion of male dictatorship and a woman as his subject, silently following the footsteps of her master. We saw in *Cocktail (2012)*, a lascivious but righteous Veronica taming herself to be a 'good Indian wife' to get accepted by her in-laws, and Goutam, the parasitical guy who lived in Veronica's place and had so much fun with her, falls for the *Sita*-like girl called Mira.In blockbusters like *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (1998), we see Rahul, who considered Anjali, especially the socially termed tomboyish Anjali to be his best friend and never nurtured any romantic inclination towards her. However, Rahul falls for the same Anjali when she grows her hair, offers *puja* every morning and wears a beautiful *Saree.* Thus year after year, women in Indian cinema have been portrayed as the society wants to see them as Nidhi Shendurnikar Tere rightly points out in her essay "Gender Reflections in Mainstream Hindi Cinema" that "Women in Bollywood have been uni-dimensional characters, who are good or bad, white or black. There are no shades of grey." (2) They have been represented as specific types; visualized as ideal mothers, submissive lovers and housewives or as dependent daughters and sisters or as immoral prostitutes, drunkards or as vamps, Gokulsing, and Dissanayake's written Indian Popular Cinema: A Narrative of Cultural Change. (2004) makes a commendable remark on this context

> She flouts tradition, seeks to imitate Western women . . . drinks, smokes, visits nightclubs, is quick to fall out of love . . . portrayed as a morally degraded person . . . unacceptable for her behavior . . . punished for it. (79)

Ideology, accepted and practised for long has cemented the edifice of women representation that is far cry from actuality. Appearance, looks and the standard of beauty have cast an all-pervasive power of patriarchy over women who are inherently treated as an object of "male gaze", as Mulvey has asserted in her *Visual and other Pleasures*.

Reconstructing the Gendered Identity

In the 1970s, the New Women Movement came into being. This new trend not only offered a new space for women in cinema but it also questioned the disparity of reel life identity of a woman and their real-life struggle. Early in the 1950s, we have seen a dominant village woman killing her own son for justice in *Mother India* which was extremely path breaking, considering the time. In the 1993 film *Damini*, we find a daughter-in-law going against the prestige and honour her powerful and wealthy in-laws in order to get justice for their housemaid Urmi who was gang-raped by her brother-in-law and his friends. The new decade brought some newness in the representation of women through a film called *Astitva*; as the title of the film suggests, 'astitva' or identity is a long-lost right by women in Bollywood

movies. The movie showcases that a woman has the right to transgress the socially drawn boundaries of morality and loyalty and has the right to choose her own identity. In 2001, a movie named *Lajja* was released which crossed many boundaries set not only by societal norms, but by religious myth. The film shows that the Indian woman is intrinsically an epitome of *Sita*, not for the unrealistic virtues she possessed but in terms of the inflictions she underwent in the name of chastity and honour. The film depicts *Maithili*, *Janki, Vaidehi*, *Ramdulari*— all the versions of *Sita* and their struggles to survive in a supremely male-centric world.

Latent Feminism: The New Wave of Reconceptualisation

Films like *Mother India*, *Damini*, *Astitva*, *Queen*, *English Vinglish*, etc. are quite straight forward and explicitly feminist in their approach having women protagonists at the pivot of the story and men residing on the periphery.There are very few films in mainstream Bollywood which put both men and women at the centre and exercise or manifest feminist traits. The approach of these movies is celebrating the differences of men and women rather than imposing equality unnecessarily. Men and women are sexually different, true equality can be attained only when we accept and celebrate this difference created by nature without any intention of creating social hierarchy. Imelda Whelehan in *Modern Feminist Thought* (1995) annihilates the concept of equality of gender as she states,

> . . . to be able to include difference in feminism, it is better to work with a removal of oppression instead of trying to create equality. (67)

The paper celebrates the cinematic representation of women; diverging from the gendered identity imposed by society, the present study is an attempt to capture the journey from considering women as fragile and object of male-gaze to constructive roles with an objective of female life having voice and agency.

Reconstructing the Heroine: Dissecting Anurag Kashyap's *Rumi* and Khalid Mohammad's *Fiza*

Since the inception of Bollywood, we have witnessed women as 'heroines' who have strived to meet up to the standard of beauty set by the male gaze of the society. Her flesh and blood existence is always denied. In this context, one can refer to Sumita Chakravarty's renowned work *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema*, *1947-1987*. It throws substantial light on some of the major women portrayals in Hindi cinema. In one of her chapters on "Women and the Burden of Post Coloniality: The Courtesan Film Genre" she writes,

> . . . we are indebted to (the first phase) western feminist film theory for our awareness of women in cinema as "object of the male gaze", the commodified image as fetish and the independent woman who is not so independent after all. (8)

Surprisingly, in recent years, Bollywood has tried to offer some exceptional women characters. It has shown a split, if not an upside down transformation. Today's heroines and their roles deviate highly from their predecessors in an unexpected manner. In this context, the bold woman protagonist Rumi from *Manmarziyaan*, deserves attention. She is a girl made of

flesh and blood, full of life and full of imperfections as Maitabi Banerjee writes in her blog titled

"Manmarziyaan, An Unapologetic Take on an Unsanskaari Woman's Heart!"(2018) that

> Rumi floats back and forth several times . . . to me, it is this imperfection of human nature that makes Manmarziyan what it is. Imperfection in choosing a man who she knows is not responsible, yet loves him. Imperfection when she deliberately keeps the price tag in her nighty during her honeymoon. She doesn't bother. All she wants is to make her ex jealous.Imperfection in daring to tell Robbie the night before marriage that she can't marry him.And, many more. (2)

Rumi is truly an embodiment of womanhood in reality. She does not have the urge to present herself as a sex object before her wooer. Rumi does not bother to comb her hair, wears a *salwar kameez* but is not bothered about carrying the *chunri* which is actually a patriarchal tool to control female sexuality.

Rumi is madly in love with the ungentlemanly Vicky. Her love for Vicky is unconditional, well-consummated; she is sexually fluid. Rumi and Vicky always have a reciprocal sexual relationship. She always acts on the *marzi* of her *mann*. The decision of marrying Vicky or someone else is completely a product of her whim. She marries Robbie without thinking about the future course; she is not calculative, she works on impulse, these are such imperfections that stereotypical Bollywood heroines have never possessed. Through Rumi we find a reconceptualised or rather reconfigured heroine as, Simranpreet Kaur and Vandana Sharma rightly points out in their article titled "Blurring the Binaries, Blending the Gender: A Transition from Male Masculinity to Female Androgyny in Hindi Cinema." (2017)

> . . . the most pronounced effect of reconfiguring gender can be seen through the transformation of women identity in the movies emerging in the recent decades because of the reconstructuring of gender relations that it has arguably initiated. (287)

What makes the film very impactful is the fact that the film does not aim at upholding any socially garnished ideology of love, sex and adultery. Rumi is vulnerable to her sexual inclination towards Vicky. She sleeps with Vicky and Robbie at the same time as she needs both of them differently, thus the film upholds the concept of loving two persons at the same time and having sexual relationships with both of them are not always wrong either. This confusion or the blurriness of this process is manifested beautifully in Anurag Kashyap's *Manmarziyaan.* The filmmaker here celebrates man's age long oscillation to choose between what they want and what the society wants. As per Maitabi Banerjee's verdict, "Anurag Kashyap quite literally thrives on these imperfections, vulnerabilities, desperations of love, and churns out a story of a difficult and knotty woman's heart that hasn't been told before".

While discussing the trope of the 'New Woman' in Bollywood, one should certainly consider the 2003 film *Fiza* which manifests a world, primarily inhabited by Muslim women.Critic turned director Khalid Mohammad has tried to subvert the age-old representation of Muslim women in Indian cinema which can be described by the words of Shourini Banerjee and Onkargouda Kakade from their article titled "Bollywood and Its Depiction of Hindu-Muslim Relationships: A Content Analysis" (2019) that

> Women are shown in stereotyped manner in films pertaining to Muslim women wherein they are regressive and submissive, looking for a male's validation for

everything. (33)

Here in the film Khalid Mohammad introduces the modern face of Muslim women who can lead a family, and also has the liberty to embark upon a journey of finding her lost brother. Here, in this film also we see how a gentle, aspiring artist, boy next door Amaan falls prey to the tumultuous communal riots of 1993 and ends up joining the terrorist group. Fiza and her mother survive with the hope of Amaan's return. During the six years of Amaan's absence, Fiza grows up to be a self-sufficient woman who does not need a man to support her and her *Ammi*.She builds a female space of her own as Parag Kumar in his article "Identity of Muslim Women in Hindi Movies." (2013) writes,

> . . . space and territory play a more decisive role while defining the identity of Fiza. Here a modern Muslim woman is shown who takes charge to find her own brother not depending on her male counterpart. She is not shown submissive. (1291)

Fiza singlehandedly continues her search for her lost brother. Her suitor Aniruddh pleads to help her in her struggle, but she fights it alone, without the help of any man or woman. She embarks on the quest and finds out that Amaan has become a part of an extremist group. But nothing could stop Fiza from her journey to bring Amaan, her brother back to mainstream life. She is such a strong character that she does not surrender even after the death of her mother. Her character gets a momentum when she kills Amaan with her own hands, only to salvage him of the mortal sins. Thus, Fiza breaks through the stereotypical feminine identity of commercial Indian Cinema where a man is always needed in order to rescue a woman. Fiza is completely different from her contemporary character sketches. She constructs her identity as a new-age Muslim woman stepping out of the closet; Through Fiza, we not only find a glimpse of the New Women of 21st Century but the identity of New Muslim Women is also configured on the Post-colonial backdrop. Parag Kumar's remark regarding identity formation of Muslim women is very crucial over here,

> The issue of identity is central to female emancipation. When this question is attached to gender relations in a male dominated society especially Muslim community in India, it acquires multiple dimensions. (1295)

What makes *Fiza* a truly feminist tale is its portrayal of male-female relationship in a new light. Here the man of the story Amaan is lulled and protected by his mother Nafizah and sister Fiza, quite contradictory to other commercial films of the late 90's or early 2000's. Thus, *Fiza* wins with all its differences and newness.

Paheli: The Dilemma of Women's Assertion of Choice and Agency

The 2005 film *Paheli* prioritises the right of women to choose themselves over their duties. The film deals with the choices the woman of the film, Lachi makes in order to resolve the dilemma of her life. The Amol Palekar directed movie is based on a short story named *Duvidha* written by Vijayadan Detha. Here, the central character Lachi faces a life changing dilemma, a dilemma of choice. When her husband Kishanlal prioritizes his business over their marriage and leaves her for five years just after the marital night, a ghost comes to woo Lachi in the disguise of Kishanlal. The ghost is not an imposter, instead of taking undue advantage of

Lachi's vulnerability; he confesses the reality to her and leaves the decision as per Lachi's 'choice'. For the first time in her life she has been asked to exercise her choice, and she chooses love and companionship over marriage Lachi does not hesitate to embrace happiness in the form of the ghost, she is not bound by the doctrine of fidelity and chastity imposed on women. From the very start we see a very assertive Lachi, who is very strong in expressing her desires as Pankaj Sachdeva in his blog "Reading Films: Of Ghost and God" (2016) writes,

> That a bride, who is traditionally portrayed as demure and coy, is not shy to celebrate the upcoming consummating of her marriage is something that even films set in the modern era are hesitant to portray. (3)

The trope of shy *dulhan* not ready to raise her veil, only her husband will do it on her behalf, has been long reiterated in mainstream Indian Cinema. On the contrary, Lachi herself proceeds to her husband and asks him to take off her veil which establishes the Lachi as a 'new woman'of commercial cinema.

When she chooses to be with the unknown self of the ghost, she actually affirms her own desires, if her husband can abandon her without asking for her consent, she is also not bound to sacrifice and compromise to sustain the marriage. *Paheli,* thus addresses the tabooed subject of self-sacrifice of women as Sutapa Chaudhuri rightly points out in her paper "Seeing like a Feminist: Representations of Societal Realities in Women-centric Bollywood Films" (2014) that

> Paheli, in addressing the issue of a woman's right to choice as well as a human self with human desires, boldly broaches a tabooed subject in the context of a patriarchal India with its venerated conservative notions of chastity and self-sacrifice in women. (6)

Therefore, *Paheli* becomes a feminist tale as it highlights women's right to choose and their control over their own life. Here, the heroine embraces a fulfilling union, a reciprocal and mutual bond breaking the barrier of propriety and marital vows. In the story *Duvidha*, the wife goes back to her husband, but Palekar consciously changes the ending in order to establish the feminist stance of his cinematic representation. In this new-age representation by Palekar, Lachi is reunited with her desired form of Kishanlal, she is reunited with the soul if not the body. The bold ending of *Paheli*, marks it way ahead of its time as it celebrates a woman's sexual autonomy above marital compulsion which is very rare to find in mainstream Bollywood.

Conclusion

The above study tries to bridge the gap between commercial cinema and women centric cinema. Cinema as a medium must accommodate men and women as per their significance in our society. The research work deals with films which normalise gender differences between men and women. The films reiterate the fact that gender equality does not demand identical traits of two distinguished genders. That is why we need to incorporate the centrality of both men and women as complementing halves in cinematic representations. In all the above-mentioned films, we find the centrality of both the male and the female characters. These films try to present the multiplicity of women character sketches; their

varied shades, emotions and flaws instead of representing the age-old homogenous Indian feminine self. The central aim of this study is to trace this journey from objectification of women to substantial subjectification without annihilating the intrinsic gendered characteristics.

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Jilted Lovers and Formulaic Romance: Normalization of Stalking in Bollywood with Reference to *Darr* and *Raanjhanaa*

Bahaar
Research Scholar
University Institute of Liberal Arts and Humanities
Chandigarh University
Gharuan, Mohali (Punjab) India
english.cu.in@gmail.com

Dr. Nipun Kalia
Associate Professor
University Institute of Liberal Arts and Humanities
Chandigarh University
Gharuan, Mohali (Punjab) India
nipun.uila@cumail.in

Abstract

Cinema plays an integral role in shaping ideas and notions. Through the medium of films, the audience is able to develop a close relationship which helps in understanding the complexities of a character. Films create an awareness of issues which are previously unheard of or unseen. Bollywood has made a huge impact on the audience. Bollywood has reflected Indian culture and tradition; values and ethics that are enlightened in Indian society. For centuries, women have been subjugated under patriarchy. They have been denied their basic right to live. Women who tried to challenge orthodox beliefs were scorned by society. A woman was always educated to be an ideal daughter, obeying the commands of her elders. In Bollywood, films portray the hero as a dignified stalker. When the hero follows the heroine, instead of condemning his act; stalking becomes a symbol of true love. The research paper analyses films like Darr and Raanjhanaa where stalking is shown to be normal. In fact, the hero is praised for sacrificing his love for the heroine. Further, which motivates men to stalk women in case, they fail to make women fall in love with them.
Keywords: Gender, Bollywood, Patriarchy, Stalking, Masculinity, Sexuality

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Introduction

Films create an awareness of issues which are previously unheard of or unseen. Moreover, it persuades the audience to rethink the issues oppressed under a hegemonic society. Hindi cinema has been critically acclaimed for representing unconventional subjects and themes among the masses. It has been one hundred and eight years since Hindi cinema saw its first silent film *Raja Harishchandra* (Dir: Dadasaheb Phalke, 1913). Bollywood has reflected Indian culture and tradition; values and ethics that are enlightened in Indian society.

The heroine in films is shown as a beautiful damsel, belonging to the rich background and eventually falling in love with the hero, who saves her from a dangerous villain.

While the hero is glorified in films during the action scenes; contrary women are objectified through their bodies during the item songs (Mukhopadhyay and Banerjee 258). In Bollywood, the characters of women are stereotyped with certain images, often leading to a wrong misconception of their choice and desires. When a hero develops feeling for his heroine, he tries to approach the heroine either by stalking or wooing her through his dancing skills. The heroine initially disapproves of him but later confesses her feelings to the hero. The hero thinks that if the woman is not accepting his love, she will gradually fall in love with him through constant effort. The research paper analyses films like *Darr* and *Raanjhanaa* where stalking is shown to be normal. In fact, the hero is praised for sacrificing his love for the heroine. Further, which motivates men to stalk women in case, they fail to make women fall in love with them. Women are sexually objectified in Bollywood songs. When the film releases, the hero is applauded for his performance whereas the heroine is remembered for her seductive dance. The heroine is type cast in two categories: either being an ideal homemaker or playing the role of an obnoxious vamp (Jha 51).

Bollywood's Formula of Love

The genre of romance is popular in Bollywood films. Romantic songs have garnered the attention of the audience. The plot of the romantic film deals with the pain and suffering endured by the hero and heroine. In order to make characters look more authentic, they were deliberately made to experience difficult situations. The sudden rise of portraying the heroes as 'Angry Young Man' during the 1970s largely contributed in further creating the gender societal norms. The strong presence of the villain trying to create complexities in the relationship of the hero and the heroine was apparent (Samraat 425). The fight between the hero and the villain, for the heroine, sporadically the hero was killed to make the ending of the film look tragic. Particularly films like *Mard* (Dir: Manmohan Desai, 1985) and *Agneepath* (Dir: Mukul S. Anand, 1990) had Amitabh Bachchan showing the characteristics of hypermasculinity.

When a heroine is introduced, she is confined to a particular behaviour which shows her obsession with beauty and complete neglect of her intelligence and courage. She is made to represent as an obedient daughter and wife who need to respect her family's decision. (Srivastava par. 9). When the hero follows the heroine, instead of condemning his act; stalking becomes a symbol of true love. The fear of rejection makes men afraid to such an extent, that they immediately start harassing women. They fail to understand that they cannot force a woman to love them. They think that in film, if the heroine values the love of the hero in the end, then, in reality, the woman they are in love would also realize their importance. This becomes problematic because men consider stalking as the right way to approach women. When a woman ignores the love of a man, she becomes the object of desire. A man decides to teach her a lesson by molesting or raping her; depicting how rejection from a woman hurts his ego. If rape is committed, everyone blames a woman instead of punishing the perpetrator. A woman is made to believe that it was her fault; she should have been cautious (Taub par. 13).

In urban cities, women who live independently come under the attack of stalking. They are stalked by obsessive lovers, who follow them everywhere which further creates problems for them. When women approach police for the help instead they are questioned and advised to be careful. It becomes easy for stalkers to roam freely but for women, it is very difficult. A stalker fails to understand that if a woman does not reciprocate his feelings, he must respect her decision. He is encouraged under the influence of films, where he watches the hero chasing a woman through stalking. In fact, men are so inspired by films, that they start copying the actions of the hero in real life (Motwani par. 9). For them, it represents the right way to approach women. In Bollywood, many songs have used certain words that describe the nature of women. When a heroine is seen smiling while the hero is trying to impress her during a song, often the hero mistakes her smile as an indication that she loves him but feels timorous to express her feeling.

Glorification of Stalking in Hindi Songs

In *Albela* (Dir: Bhagwan Dada, 1951) heroine sings '*Sham dhale khidki tale tum seeti bajana chhod do'* (During sunset, you must stop whistling while looking at the window) when she sees the hero waiting for her outside the house. The hero is not ashamed that he is stalking a girl. He rather forces the heroine to accept his feelings, even though she does not show interest. They believe stalking would be appropriate for them in order to pursue the love of women. In *Paying Guest* (Dir: Subodh Mukherjee, 1957) Dev Anand says '*Maana janaab ne pukaara nahee, kya meraa saath bhee gawaara nahee'* (I agree the beloved did not call, does my presence so unbearable) when he follows Nutan while riding a bicycle. The heroine is walking alone on the road. Indeed; it becomes easy for the hero to express his feelings to the heroine. The hero is confident and resolute in winning her heart. He tries to grab the hand of the heroine, even though she requests him to stop. In the song, often the hero is depicted as an obsessive lover who wants to control the life of the heroine. The boy never reveals his feelings in an appropriate way instead preferring to stalk; which makes the life of a girl miserable. In fact, he comes to the conclusion that girls intentionally reject boys because they love to be chased by them.

In *An Evening in Paris* (Dir: Shakti Samanta, 1967), the hero suggests to the heroine that she must accompany him instead of going alone to an unknown place. In the song, '*Akele Akele kahan ja rahe ho'* (Where are you going alone), Shammi Kapoor follows the heroine everywhere, despite being aware that she is not feeling comfortable with him; still, he urges her to love his company. This shows that the hero disrespects the freedom of the heroine. When men decide to win the love of women, they do not consider stalking heinous. Men think they are in love, so it does not matter if they choose to stalk instead of confronting their feelings to women. This further intensifies the situation since men start believing that whatever they are doing is absolutely correct. In fact, they are not even afraid of law. *Sholay* (Dir: Ramesh Sippy, 1975) has a song '*Koi haseena jab rooth jati hain to, aur bhi haseen ho jaati hain'* (When a woman is angry, she looks beautiful) where hero is seen telling heroine that he loves her anger because it makes her look beautiful. The hero is trying to convince the heroine that she must forget his mistake. In the song, the heroine is annoyed with the

behaviour of the hero. In fact, the hero thinks that by performing funny tricks the heroine will accept his feelings.

Women are lambasted when they do not live according to the expectation of society. They still struggle against having an education (Jha par. 4). Moreover, women are not easily supported if they want to pursue their dream. *Phool Aur Kaante* (Dir: Kuku Kohli, 1991) has a song '*Premi Aashiq Aawaara'* (Lover, admirer, wanderer) where the hero follows the heroine while she goes for running with her friends. He is riding the bike in order to impress her, but the heroine does not give him attention. When the hero sees that the heroine is not looking at him, he immediately falls from the bike. He is happy when she comes to see him; intentionally tries to get her attention. Hero tells the heroine that because of her love he has become mad. He blames her for his strange behaviour.

In *Major Saab* (Dir: Tinnu Anand, 1998) the hero is advising the heroine that she should be careful while travelling alone. The song, '*Akeli na bazaar jaya karo'* (Do not go alone when you go to market) depicts the hero is worried about the heroine going alone to market. He thinks that heroine will feel unsafe around other men. The hero appreciates her beauty and suggests that she must protect herself from black magic. He sings '*Maine tumse yeh kaha tha mujhe sath le ke chalna'* (I told you earlier, to take me along with you) which means men think women are unable to take care of themselves. They are not concerned of their safety. Therefore, women need the help of men when they are in a difficult situation. The hero continuously grabs the hand of the heroine and says '*Deewana kar dogi duniya ko tum'* (You will make the world go crazy for you) which shows that the hero is not happy when other men look at the heroine. Ironically, the hero warns the heroine of not going alone as other men may stalk her; unable to realize that he is also stalking the heroine.

When men see the heroine in a film, they unknowingly categorize the character of the heroine with other women. Men start to judge women on the basis of their attire. They do not understand that women deserve love and compassion. Women are made to believe that they can never defeat men. Men are assumed to be stronger than women. When women are restricted from going outside, it shows their freedom has been denied. Men presume that women wear short dresses for the purpose of attracting them. They think women strive for sexual pleasure. Men get frustrated when they are rejected by women. The songs made in Bollywood contain identical lyrics and themes which represent the heroine as a commodity (Gupta par. 13). When the hero goes against her decision, she is asked to show only an expression of unhappiness rather admonishing the hero not to interfere in her decision. But this never occurs since the role played by the heroine in the film is to look attractive, so that hero gets the opportunity to chase her; thereby stalking becomes necessary for the hero.

Dignified Stalkers in *Darr* and *Raanjhanaa*

Darr: *A Violent Love Story* (Dir: Yash Chopra, 1993) is considered a blockbuster among the audience. In the film, Kiran is a young woman studying in college. While waiting for her boyfriend, Kiran receives numerous letters, unaware they are being written by Rahul who has a secret crush on her; letters read passionately by Kiran make Rahul believe she is in love. Thereafter, the song '*Jadoo teri nazar'* (Magic is your gaze) begins where Rahul

expresses his love by singing, '*Jadoo teri nazar, Khushboo tera badan, Tu haan kar ya na kar, Tu hai meri Kiran'* (Magic is your gaze, Fragrance is your body, whether you agree or disagree, you are mine Kiran) which show he will not accept Kiran refusing his love. During a scene, Rahul walks on the terrace while plucking petals from the flower. He persistently repeats if Kiran likes him or not; depicting his serious obsession for Kiran. Rahul is mentally disturbed after losing his mother during childhood. He shares cordial relationship with his father.

Raanjhanaa (Dir: Aanand L. Rai, 2013) marked debut of South actor Dhanush. The film is popular among the audience. In the film, Kundan falls in love with Zoya who belongs to the Muslim community. While watching a film at the theatre, Kundan is suggested by his friend he must express his love to Zoya. Kundan decides to stalk Zoya wherever she goes; unaware he is doing wrong. After various attempts, he tries to meet Zoya. When Kundan confesses his love, he is slapped by Zoya. The lines said by Kundan '*Itna toh hum soch ke aye hai, maar do'* (I already have thought before I came, slap me) depict men considering the slap of women as the first step towards attaining their love. Kundan persuades Zoya to accept his love otherwise he would slit his wrist. Finally, Zoya expresses love to Kundan.

When Kundan comes to know Zoya is going to marry a doctor, he forcefully grabs her hand by saying '*Kaat chuke hain ek baar apni kalai, Iss baar yaad rakhna tumhari katege'* (I already had once cut my wrist, remember this time I am going to cut yours) show men are not able to tolerate their love being snatched away from them. Kundan does not want to face the reality that Zoya only had a crush on him during childhood. In fact, still he is in the false belief that Zoya will accept his love. When Zoya tells Kundan that she does not want to marry a doctor, he becomes happy. Later, Zoya reveals that she is in love with a man who is from Delhi. Kundan unable to control his emotion tries to attempt suicide. He tells Zoya '*Tumhien kya lagta hai Zoya tum bahut hur ki pari ho'* (What you think of yourself Zoya, you are a beautiful damsel) which shows men believe women love to play with their emotions.

Throughout the film, the character of Kundan is depicted as an innocent man. Though he stalks Zoya, forcing her to fall in love with him; the audience eulogizes him for being a great lover. There is no emphasis made on the way he stalks Zoya. In fact, he makes the audience fall in love with his personality. While Zoya becomes the culprit; contrary Kundan is glorified among the audience. People love Kundan for sacrificing his life for Zoya (De). *Raanjhanaa* clearly shows stalking to be right among men. In end, while Kundan is taking his last breath, he utters lines '*Par uthenge kisi roz, Kisi Zoya ke ishq me phir se padh jane ko'* (Will wake up one day, again falling in love with some other Zoya) showing he still has feelings for Zoya even though she declines his love. Moreover, the title suggests Kundan as the beloved of Zoya. When the audience watches Kundan on screen, they show sympathy for him after Zoya rejects his love.

Conclusion

In *Darr: A Violent Love Story* and *Raanjhanaa*, stalking by the hero is normalized. When Kiran refuses love of Rahul, he never loses hope since he lives in the illusion that Kiran will eventually accept his love. While Kundan also develops a similar mindset. Since stalking

is made to believe like true love. Man thinks that he will change a woman's mind by following her everywhere. He begins to get inspired from films, where the hero wins the heart of his heroine by stalking (Dash par. 7). Women are always presented as being submissive to men in films. Whenever a heroine dislikes his hero, she is made to look confused about her decisions. In some cases, the hero becomes aggressive while trying to make her fall in love with him. Indeed; becomes obsessed with her, forcing the woman to accept his love. This develops a culture of stalking depicted through songs and films. In most Bollywood films, a college scene occurs where the hero tries to tease the heroine by touching her inappropriately. When the heroine rebukes him for his actions, the hero considers this a threat to his masculinity.

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Female Masculinity and Homosociality: Reconnoitering the Female Bond in Padmarajan's *Deshadanakkili Karayarilla*

Niranjana J
Research Scholar
School of Social Sciences and Languages
Vellore Institute of Technology
Vellore (Tamil Nadu) India
niranjana.j777@gmail.com

Dr. Yadamala Sreenivasulu
Assistant Professor
School of Social Sciences and Languages
Vellore Institute of Technology
Vellore (Tamil Nadu) India
yadamala.sreenivasulu@vit.ac.in

Abstract

Female masculinity, a relatively new realm of study brought forth by Judith Halberstam accentuates the neglected form of masculinity performance by women, which is tormented by throwing stigmatizing and stereotyping remarks by the society. The patriarchal society considers young masculine girls as tomboys and there is a tendency to downgrade women who crossdress as men. The paper analyses how female masculinity is projected subtly in Padmarajan's Deshadanakkili Karayarilla *(1986) by studying the character of Sally and how society deals with the tomboyish Sally and the feminine Nimmy contradictorily. Further, the researchers try to explore the problematic function of the term 'homosociality' which always talks about 'bromance' or the platonic intimacy between male best friends but hardly the female relationships. The study is enthused by the fact that* Deshadanakkili Karayarilla *is such an open-ended film that promises the opportunity of deducing the climax to the audience. An argument is made regarding the lesbian undertones emanated from the film which might be a possible misunderstanding of homosociality among the two girls Nimmy (Nirmala) and Sally.*
Keywords: Female Masculinity, Homosociality, Padmarajan, Judith Halberstam, Crossdressing, Deshadanakkili Karayarilla

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Masculinity studies is an offspring of Feminism that arises from the impending necessity of including men in the deduction of patriarchal atrocities. It can never be considered the antonym of feminism rather both are the two sides of the same coin. In the ambit of gender studies, masculinity studies play a vital role in understanding the workings of men, the suggested stereotypical qualities of being a man, and the distinct hierarchical levels among them. Masculinity is always seen as behaviors or qualities that are both physically and

psychologically associated with manhood. It is R. W. Connell, one of the prominent masculinity theorists, who delineates the different types of masculinities based on their position in society as "Hegemonic, Complicit, Subordinate, and Marginalized masculinities" (Connell 76). Nevertheless, Judith Halberstam extended the realm further by including female masculinity, validating women who feel more masculine than feminine. Second-wave feminism perpetually indicated that gender differences are socially constructed. Simone Beauvoir remarkably declared that "one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one" (Beauvoir 301). Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* opines that it is "impossible to separate out gender from political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained" (Butler 5). It means that gender is something that one performs or does constantly rather than inherent in the body. Gender is not an essence of the biological body, and it is shown as socio-culturally constructed.

Judith Halberstam's *Female Masculinity* (1998) makes the unexpected notion of studying masculinity without men. According to her, female masculinity is applauded when it is showcased by a heteronormative woman but looked down upon when it is a homosexual woman. She voices out the recent problematic tendency to categorize women who project masculinity as lesbians, often calling them derogatory terms. "Female masculinity 'refers to traditionally masculine traits of character or appearance occurring in biological women' (Gardiner 203). According to Halberstam, masculinity is seldom something that should be reduced to the male body and its effects. It is not an imitation of maleness rather it "actually affords us a glimpse of how masculinity is constructed as masculinity. (Halberstam 1) It is 'an elusive, inherently paradoxical concept that slips away from efforts to pin it down' (Gardiner 584). Masculinity inherent in a female body is not male masculinity interchanged, rather it is another type of masculinity in its entirety even though it has connections with male masculinity. Female masculinity may result in anxiety on the part of men which stems from the fear of losing hold of masculinity when women break free from the culturally expected gender roles. This concept itself unveils the arbitrary relationship between masculinity and the male body. "Female masculinity in this case is a call to open up new gender presentations for women and to help make them culturally legible" (Reeser 135). Lesbianism is often linked with female masculinity but there is no link between the two as 'female masculinity can be heterosexual and as lesbianism can be unmasculine' (Reeser 135). There is a tendency for female masculinity to occur more rarely than male masculinity also it can never be a constant representation of the same for that matter. The possibility of Sally being a lesbian here is flimsy because her masculine traits occur rarely or at times when it physically demands. It should be noted that women who display masculinity are often ridiculed, mainly by men themselves. It is because, "Negative responses to women who exhibit masculinity help insure men's domination over masculinity, making them its sole purveyor" (Reeser 132).

Female masculinity is a rarely explored area. The expectation of stereotypical representation of gender roles differs considerably from female masculinity. It is also perplexing to patriarchal regimens to see a bend in the gender roles where women themselves exhibit masculine qualities and are included by creating a category called female masculinity. The introduction of female masculinity into the radius of masculinity studies by Judith

Halberstam can be partly due to her personal experiences as a masculine woman. She says, 'masculine girls and women do not have to wear their masculinity as a stigma but can infuse it with a sense of pride and indeed power' (xi). She continues, “I was a masculine girl, and I am a masculine woman. For much of my life, my masculinity has been rendered shameful by public responses to my gender ambiguity. However, in the last ten years, I have been able to tum stigma into strength” (xii). Masculinity itself is a fluid and complicated phenomenon to comprehend and we find difficulty in explaining what all qualities make an ideal man. 'As a society, we have little trouble in recognizing it, and indeed we spend massive amounts of time and money ratifying and supporting the versions of masculinity that we enjoy and trust; many of these "heroic masculinities" depend absolutely on the subordination of alternative masculinities' (Halberstam 1).

Padmarajan is known for his mastery in writing about characters that are not dealt with by other writers and directors. He gave significance to both female and male characters rather than pushing women to the periphery as supporting characters. He seldom had a problem writing about social outcastes like prostitutes drawing the physical and psychological complexities of their lives as in *Thoovanathumbikal*, *Arappatta Kettiya Gramathil,* and *Peruvazhiyambalam*, viewing them through another lens. Nimmy and Sally are also carefully crafted characters of Padmarajan who exhibit polar opposite personalities but are oddly interwoven.

The researchers in the paper argue that the relationship between Nimmy and Sally is a pure and divine friendship where they rely on each other for anything and everything. The background gives us an idea of why they become aloof from others and why they find solace in each other. Their friendship reaches an extreme level where none of them does anything without consulting each other. The film centers on two teenage girls who are fed up with the controlling and subjecting society and institutions which constrain their liberty. In a heated moment, to punish the teacher who has been mentally torturing them, they run away in between a school picnic, so that the teacher responsible gets the blame for the same. They try to live alone in a heteronormative, male-dominated society, find jobs to support them financially, and bravely fight a world that tries to torment two fearless and freedom-loving girls. The downfall starts when a stranger befriends Nimmy to whom she starts feeling affection, but he was doing nothing but nudging her to believe that the feelings are mutual. Though Sally tries to warn Nimmy, the latter is swept off by the charming honey-coated words of Hari Shankar only to realise later that he was using her to help Sreedevi, his fiancé, and the dreadful teacher of the girls. The ending is tragic where we can see the lifeless bodies of Nimmy and Sally in a warm embrace.

Both Sally and Nimmy's characters are stark opposites though they share a hearty bond. Nimmy is a nervous young girl who gets constant support from Sally, who is a bold and courageous girl. This audacity makes people assume Sally is the masculine one and the situation accentuates when she crops her hair to complete her disguise. It is interesting to note that the way both girls are treated by society is entirely different. Hari Shankar in this matter is significant where he chooses the 'feminine' one to manipulate and to make her fall in love with him and not the bold, masculine, 'tomboy' who is always dubious of his actions. In a way, he succeeds in his plot but never gets to finish his deed.

Deshadanakkili Karayarilla has always been hailed for projecting homosexuality at a time it was considered obnoxious. People cannot be blamed for thinking so as Padmarajan was an iconoclast and he was an expert at portraying situations and characters which were considered taboo at that time, precisely, in the 80s. But *Deshadanakkili Karayarilla* is a brilliant execution of a beautiful female bond where women are not projected as hateful towards each other, but they love each other to the core and do anything for each other. What makes people assume Nimmy and Sally's relationship as lesbianism is Sally's exhibition of masculinity and her sudden jealousy towards Hari Shankar who tries to steal her best friend. But was it really because of her love for Nimmy or her instinct to save her best friend from an unknown person?

One of the reasons why *Deshadanakkili Karayarilla* is seen as a movie before its time is mainly because of the lesbian vibes it emanates. Nimmy and Sally share an exceptional friendship which is often studied as lesbian love, though only one vague dialogue by Sally to Nimmy '*After all these whiles, didn't you understand me dear*' is lifted as the only hint or evidence of the same. Anagha S. has opined about the film as a 'powerful story about teenage life, queer relationships and the complex social and moral stigma around teenage girls.' She goes on to explain how queer individuals are alienated in society and Nimmy and Sally break free and soar high to freedom. As per the interview of Muhammed Unais, a queer rights activist by Neelima Menon, *Deshadanakkili Karayarilla* should be read from a lesbian angle. According to him, the cropped hair of Sally and her jealousy hint at her lesbianism. An unnamed blogger declares about *Deshadanakkili Karayarilla* that 'One had to be either incredibly naive or seemingly callous to miss the signals and the strong undercurrent in the movie.' In her article titled "Womance Depicted in Malayalam Cinema with Special Reference to the Movie Desatanakkili Karayarilla", though Keerthy Sophiya Ponnachan attempts to delineate the homosocial relation in the movie, the discussion slips again toward the homosexuality between the girls. In an article that lists the Malayalam movies exploring same-sex relationships, Nikhil Pandey places *Desadanakkili Karayarilla* on the top itself. Reviewing all these writings that spotlight homosexuality in *Desadanakkili Karayarilla*, the researchers try to contemplate the gender workings in the movie as homosociality and not homosexuality. The depiction of two female characters in a close relationship can never be always considered a homosexual relationship. Here, Sally's female masculinity traits confuse the audience into thinking she is a lesbian.

Understanding Homosociality in *Deshadanakkili Karayarilla*

The notion of homosociality was instituted into the ambit of gender studies by Jean Lipman- Blumen in her 1976 paper titled *Toward a Homosocial Theory of Sex Roles: An Explanation of the Sex Segregation of Social Institutions*. But the concept got accentuated with the advancement made by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick where it was used to discuss and critically analyze the 'non-sexual, same-sex bonds, specifically between men' (Gabriel 49). It was then taken up and studied by other scholars including David van Leer, Lynn Hunt, Richard Collier, Sharon Bird, Michael Kimmel, Gabriel, and Michael Flood among others. Homosociality is a complex concept that is almost always tied with the bond between men and

rarely women. Nevertheless, it constitutes a non-sexual relationship between people belonging to the same sex, even between homosexuals if it does not involve physical relations. This bond is enacted or in Kimmel's words, it is a 'homosocial enactment' (129) whereby the bond is reinforced in various situations.

Why do people get the urge to categorise Nimmy and Sally's obsessive friendship as homosexual love and not as a special homosocial bond which is often shared by men? The answer to that is problematic but quite evident. It is a common view that out of the multiple academic workings, the term 'bromance' is quite repetitive and oft-heard but 'womance' or the asexual relationship between two women is seldom heard. “The term was adopted in an attempt to account for the increasingly intimate and emotional affection being displayed between heterosexual men on the silver screen and in celebrity culture” (DeAngelis126). The homosociality between men is always taken into notice may be because of 'homohysteria' which means “the fear of being socially perceived as homosexual—something made possible because heterosexuality cannot be definitively proven among straight men in a culture that is both aware and fearful of homosexuality” (McCormack 157).

Though homohysteria can also be associated with women, they have been comparatively less policed by the constructs of homophobia. Hence, women have been able to exhibit emotional and physical behaviors to each other without getting labeled as homosexuals. When it comes to the portrayal of Nimmy and Sally the perceived notion was that they were best friends and nothing more. But with the passage of time, when the generation changed, a tendency has occurred to consider their relationship as a homosexual relationship portrayed subtly by Padmarajan. But just like 'Bromance', 'Womance' also exist, and it does not necessarily slip into homosexuality. Womance is a portmanteau of the words woman and romance, and it represents the platonic love between two women. The reason why there is minimality of homosocial bonding of women is vague, but the number of representations is for sure limited, especially in Malayalam cinema. Exceptions in cinema can be *Deshadanakkili Karayarilla* (1986) *Heavenly Creatures* (1994) *Bridesmaids* (2011) *Rani Padmini* (2015) etc. which show unconditional love between two or more women without any lesbian undertones.

The projection of female masculinity is one of the reasons why society considers those women homosexuals. But the attitudes, behaviors as well as sartorial qualities of men are not always followed by women. There exists a popular opinion especially among men that lesbians are always manly and exhibit masculinity, but in fact, lesbians do not necessarily be masculine, there are masculine heterosexuals and feminine homosexuals. In the case of Nimmy and Sally, Nimmy's femininity makes her the submissive, female partner and Sally's masculinity makes her the dominant one, who in the eyes of patriarchal spectators, controls Nimmy and makes crucial decisions. Padmarajan openly portrays how a patriarchal society treats women who show slight deviation in their gender roles. Calling them lesbians is one way of pushing them down from an act of aggression and power. It is a matter of stability for men when they witness an equal display of power and enthusiasm.

Nimmy is a shy and modest girl who always hides behind Sally's bravado. In almost all scenarios, it is Sally who plots their further actions to which Nimmy concedes. When both get punishment from the principal for skipping the class and going to the cinema, Nimmy

weeps like a child while Sally remains stoic, her face plain without revealing a tinge of pain on her face. This initial scene itself hints to the viewers about the opposing characters of Nimmy and Sally. Apart from that, Sally consoles Nimmy saying, "*it's alright dear*" even though she is the one who gets more beatings. Their most dangerous feat was the elopement knowing that they will be expelled in the coming academic year. Sally assures that if they must go, she will take down Devika teacher also. This one-time Nimmy shows clear apprehension to which Sally says:

> "Come on! I'm with you. I won't allow anyone to eat you!"
>
> Nimmy: What if they eat you!?
>
> Sally: Me? If they eat me, it will be like eating a porcupine! (Both laugh) (Deshadanakkili Karayarilla (25:11- 25:16)

The instances which are considered Sally's possessive exhibitions turn out to be her unconditional love and care for Nimmy who finds Hari Shankar as her love of life. More than jealousy, Sally feels anxious about Nimmy's forgetfulness where the latter blurts out every information about her and Sally to Hari Shankar, a total stranger. Hari Shankar immediately after the meeting with the two girls realizes both of their characters. The fear in Nimmy's eyes and the arrogance in Sally's make him understand whom to turn to. Stopped by Sally each time, Nimmy perspires, caught between a possible lover and her best friend. Hari Shankar asks sarcastically to Sally:

> "Oh! You must be her local guardian!"
>
> Sally: Yes! I am! (Deshadanakkili Karayarilla (01:06:43- 01:06:46)

To Nimmy, Hari Shankar instantly becomes an evitable part, a person with whom she can share everything. Though Sally is anxious about her best friend, she wants the best for her. She says:

> "Dear, you're saved. Be it affection, fascination, or love, if you get that deep connection, half your problems are solved. But one must be very careful!" (Deshadanakkili Karayarilla (01:10:42- 01:10:56)

As mentioned before, Sally's crossdressing is another trait that scholars find as a part of her homosexuality. "A crossdresser can be defined as someone who occasionally wears or dresses up in clothing and accessories that are seen as belonging to the 'opposite' of their 'biological sex'. The practice of cross-dressing is combined with a wide range of possibilities in terms of sexuality and 'gender identity'" (Vencato 4-5). Sally is a girl who likes to wear 'men's wear' with her hair cropped short as against Nimmy who flaunts her feminine beauty. Sally's cross-dressing does not make her a lesbian as a major number of scholars are claiming. She does it as a part of her disguise though she is not a fan of feminine softness. There is no fixity in the dressing style of Sally though. But to escape from the lookout notice, she is forced to change her appearance, not forcing it on Nimmy.

Conclusion

This paper explores the often-misread portrayal of two girls in Padmarajan's *Deshadanakkili Karayarilla* as a homosexual relationship but in actuality, it is a deep platonic bond between them that arises from their frustrated lonely lives. Homosocial exhibitions

between women are hardly seen in media though there are umpteen examples of male homosocial bonds or 'bromance'. Mostly, women are represented as hateful to each other, especially in a teenage scenario but *Deshadanakkili Karayarilla* is an exception which may be one of the reasons why people mistake it for a homosexual relationship. Recently, the term 'womance' is slowly getting recognition though much of the scholarship is owed to bromance. The depiction of a deep connection between two or more heterosexual men is often seen and heard but the same about women is not that visible when it comes to media. Especially in Malayalam cinema or Malayalam serials, women are often portrayed as backstabbing each other and rarely do we see women on the same side. Padmarajan made a vast difference in this by bringing forth genuine love and friendship between two teenage girls. It is possible to interpret the love between the girls are a homosexual relationship, but the chances are too low. There is no significant evidence for concluding the same notion but only assumed possibilities. As much as we appreciate the multiple interpretations of a text, the tendency to label two females who project obsessive friendship, as lesbians should not be entertained.

One of the reasons for this misrepresentation is Sally's exhibition of female masculinity. Women who exhibit masculine traits belong to what Judith Halberstam terms female masculinity, and women do not necessarily be homosexuals to show masculinity. Sally's cross-dressing tendencies and boldness push her into the category of female masculinity, but the researchers disambiguate Nimmy and Sally's relationship as homosocial and not homosexual. Also, Sally's female masculinity does not make her a lesbian for that matter.

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En/gendering Resistance through Silence: Revisiting the Character of *Balo* in Mani Kaul's *Uski Roti*

Surya Prakash Verma
Assistant Professor
Dept. of English
Baiswara P.G. College
Lalganj, Raebareli (Uttar Pradesh) India
surya2145536@gmail.com

Binod Mishra
Professor of English
Dept. of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology
Roorkee (Uttarakhand) India
mishra.binod@gmail.com

Abstract

The present article explores the efficiency of the idea of implied silence in Mani Kaul's film Uski Roti*. Furthermore, it analyses how the passive resistance of the characters impacts the audience more than their active participation. The subtle employment of silence in the film that emerges as passive resistance is camouflaged in the female protagonist Balo. A majority of Indian women are conditioned in a way which makes them incapable of active resistance against the highly self-destructive patriarchal society. Balo's silence leaves the audience in a state of disturbance. The article dwells on the following propositions: (1) To disturb the audience is more formative than to inspire them. (2) Silence speaks more than the voices, and absence becomes more prominent than presence. Moreover, Kennan Ferguson's view of 'constitutive silence' has been taken as supportive proposition to the present article.*
Keywords: Indian New Wave, Mani Kaul, Passive-Resistance, Silence, Uski Roti*, Women*

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The Anatomy of *Uski Roti* [Our Daily Bread]

Mani Kaul, an Indian filmmaker, and a student of legendary Ritwik Ghatak, adapted a story "Uski Roti" into a film. The story was written by Mohan Rakesh, a pioneer of Nayi Kahani Movement in Hindi Literature. Kaul was only twenty-five when he made *Our Daily Bread,* the first of his feature films. It was a film which brought Kaul the 1970 Filmfare Critics Award for Best Movie. Since then, the film has become an essential part of Indian New Wave Cinema, and it has been praised by many of his contemporaries.

Indian New Wave of Cinema came into existence with Mrinal Sen's *Bhuvan Shome* (1969) and Shyam Benegal's *Ankur* (1974). "In the late 1960s and 1970s, it became a wave

and earned a niche for itself, which is known by various names as the aforementioned Indian New Wave, Parallel Cinema or Alternative Cinema or New Cinema." (Sachdeva 9) Avijit Ghosh, in his article "Mani Kaul was, by far, most original filmmaker: Benegal", has aptly outlined the prominence of Mani Kaul amongst the filmmakers:

> For me, [*Uski Roti*] [1970] is as much a landmark as [*Pather Panchali*]. "Mani Kaul was, by far, our most original filmmaker," says film director Shyam Benegal. Film critic Aruna Vasudev maintains that the movie-maker "forged a totally new path". And actor Mita Vashisht says, "He was a master of the frame of his craft" (Ghosh).

The adaptations of Mani Kaul were less related to the "benefits of an industry-centric adaptation model" and more oriented toward enhancing the communicability of a work of art (Murray 14). Mani Kaul left the conventional form of cinematic narrative in the movie to paint every shot like a painter, which becomes clear with the following statement: "When I made A Day's Bread, I wanted to completely destroy any semblance of a realistic development so that I could construct the film almost in the manner of a painter" (New York 18). The movie's plot was so ultra-realistic that it was impossible to understand when it was shown to the audience in New York on 9-11 August 1994. All the shots in the movie are overextended purposefully, cutting it from the resemblance of some grander design. When asked about the plot, Mani Kaul said:

> Really, there is no plot at all in the film...I was living as a 'paying guest' with a family at the time I made A Day's Bread. At a dinner with a group of people, the man in the family was explaining, "Mani Kaul has made this film where there is a woman who goes to the bus stop and waits …" when his wife interrupted to say, "William, you're telling them the whole plot!" (New York 18).

The plot of the film is to showcase the patience of a woman who waited for her husband unless he accepted the bread—metaphorically, understood her position without the implication of any justification. Every shot in the movie is an organic whole—all of them depict the delayed sense of time. There is no clear division between the flashbacks and the main narrative. For instance, there is a scene in the film when dejected *Balo* is waiting for *Suchcha Singh*, at the same time, we find various scenes of her home flashing where she converses with her sister. Those scenes seem to be part of her vision, but again it is just a part of Kaul's quest to make the movie thoroughly suggestive.

The Function of Silence: A Theoretical Framework

It is not always inevitable for performative arts that characters convey messages only through dialogues. In the case of an artist, eminently, when it comes to filmmakers, necessary pauses and silence become more effective tools than speech. While too many dialogues fill the audience's mind with maddening voices restraining them from thinking, gaps between the words or the unprecedented silences force them to use their wit. This process makes the audience see things clearly, and they do it for themselves. Silence is not a passive act but, on the contrary, it remains highly political, and becomes an epitome of rebellion. "Silence functions constitutively" (Ferguson 54). As far as the methodology is concerned, we intend to read the film as a text which incorporates the agony and rebellion of the women living in an

extremely vicious patriarchal society.

Balo, the protagonist of the film, finds herself not only in a situation where she cannot work but also at a point in time when she cannot speak. If *Balo* uses words to justify her delayed actions, she risks her husband getting into trouble. Her husband, *Suchcha Singh* is a typical deviant driver as regards his social and professional stance. A short-tempered man of actions, he cannot wait to fight and obtain the dire consequences. Thus, *Balo* goes on a mental dual with her husband by not speaking. Mani Kaul happens to be interested in suggestive art; therefore, he does not add any episode of the past life of *Jungi*, a man who is accused of molesting *Balo*'s sister. In the story of Mohan Rakesh, we find that he was a man of crimes. *Balo* knew that the indiscreet actions of her husband would not run in their favour. She awaits, with all her patience, the moments when all the charges against her will be dismissed. Fergusonian view of constitutive silence seems to have been fully realised.

Balo is amongst Mani Kaul's female characters who are meeker even than the female protagonist of *The Meek One*. Any spoken effort made by *Balo* for her justification would have probably led to the same inexplicability and complexity. It is her silence which leads *Balo* to the desired result. Her situation is definitely not Wittgenstein's stance of linguistic failure to utter something that cannot be said— "What we cannot speak about, we must pass over in silence" (Wittgenstein 89). *Balo*'s silence is not the absence of right words, but it is the unavailability of an ideal state of affairs where she could utter the words of her justification. The silence in the film functions two-fold. If the first is to fulfil *Balo*'s purpose, the second one is to derive a condition for the audience where they can become uncomfortable and think. The film does not convey any monolithic statement in general, which could provide a solution to escape a situation where *Balo* is confined. Mani Kaul infers the improbability of resemblances between any two such random problems. It leaves us with an extrapolated function of silence in a chaotic situation where we are supposed to find the solutions for ourselves. The absence of speech suggests the absence of a method for finding a way out.

Balo* and *Our Daily Bread

The exposition of plot of the movie goes in the following way: *Jindan*, sister of *Balo*, most often gets harassed, in her way, by *Jungi*, a man thrice her age. Since she was there to collect objects for making the 'unusual' Bread, consequently she reaches home late. The event affects the main storyline of the film. *Balo* skips *Suchcha*'s time and feels guilty about not being able to provide food for her husband. *Suchcha Singh* refuses the food even on the second trip while *Balo* stands waiting to give him the same. At this point, she needs to justify her position, yet she chooses not to speak. When asked by *Suchcha Singh* why she was late, she reasons without any proposition; promises to tell him when he is home, and the rest is silence from her side. Here, she seems to seek another opportunity to reveal the cause. But she does not offer the reason to *Suchcha Singh*, only because it was not the right time but also, because she has been contemplating it from the very beginning that she would not tell the truth. She cannot tell the truth because she knows the possible consequences—a prominent possibility of blood being shed as a probable consequence of combat between her husband and *Jungi*.

In the film *Uski Roti, Balo* chooses the act of spontaneous solidarity and decides to give *Suchcha Singh* the food. The acceptance of food would symbolise the success of the theory, but *Suchcha* does not accept it and instead drives away. *Balo* ends up waiting for his return till the night falls without unveiling what happened in the village. The spontaneous solidarity is a concept which is often applied to a group of people with a shared interest. Following the previous obligation, all the characters in the film as well as the audience, happen to be equals when it comes to establishing coordination in their lives. The bread works as a vehicle to mend the loss of harmony in life.

In 2012, *The Times of India* published the following story which happened to be about the prominence of silence in any conversation:

> Two old men, friends of many years standing, would meet in each other's house every day. They would sit in perfect silence for a couple of hours, then the visitor would get up and leave, without a word of farewell. The inevitable happened and, in the natural course of things, one of the old men died. "You must miss him a lot," said a condoler to the survivor. "I do," replied the bereaved friend. "What I particularly miss are the long conversations we used to enjoy with each other". (Suraiya)

The story affirms how it is rarely crucial to use words to express our thoughts. It is only through gestures and silences that we can convey our most profound impression.

Mani Kaul's *Uski Roti* substitutes the dialogues for silence. There is a scene in the movie where *Jungi* makes physical advances on *Balo*'s sister. The girl resists by saying that she will tell her sister. But later in the scene, she remains silent. The silence used here is intended for the audience. When we go through these silences, a burden of responsibility comes upon us. The girl's silence is designed to make the audience struggle at the same intensity as *Jindan* does. *Balo*'s inaction after listening to the whole story makes us feel more uncomfortable. Scenes of continuous inaction and silence leading to *Balo*'s passive-resistance germinate a feeling of resistance in the audience. We do not feel as relieved as we do after watching the film in which the protagonist finds all the answers and performs the just actions for us or in comedy shows where laughter is inbuilt. On the one hand, where television laughs for us in the TV Shows like *Friends* and *Big Bang Theory,* on the contrary, in the movie *Uski Roti* neither the action is performed on our behalf, nor the dialogues are spoken for us. Contrary to the concept of subjugating the audience's minds with an inflexible solution, Kaul offers appropriate space for everyone to find out one's remedy.

The incompetency between required action and speech in the film disturbs us and gets registered in that part of our brain where we can never forget it. The disturbance caused by silences seems to be the only reason why Kaul implied the patterns of silence and inaction in the film. Derek Malcolm, in "Mani Kaul Obituary", has pointed out Kaul's most probable intention:

> He was a stern critic of orthodox storytelling and especially the modern gyrations of Bollywood. "If film shows you something you already know," he once said, "where will it lead us?" The film is not an orthodox narrative, dealing instead with silence, mood and imagery… It caused a huge stir, even being lambasted in the Indian parliament by a member who said it was so boring she would never forget it.

Kaul took the intended insult as high praise. (Malcolm)

Situational silences become more prominent in *Uski Roti* than structured dialogues. *Balo* becomes Mani Kaul's mouthpiece in following the idea of inappropriate silence, leading to her resistance.

Lakshmi, the female protagonist of Shyam Benegal's Ankur (1974), follows passive resistance, much like *Balo*. With a likeness to *Balo*, *Lakshmi* also works on the theory of passive resistance throughout the entire film. She resists actively only once in the movie, which only happens towards the end, which makes her case different from Balo's position. There are moments in our life when we are restrained to "observe and not to alter" (Kafka 9*)*. During such moments, being alive and surviving becomes more important than the act of rebellion. When the film *Ankur* nears its end, we witness the volcanic outburst of Lakshmi, who has been almost silent throughout the movie. The seedling of rebellion that Shyam Benegal chose to depict through the character of *Lakshmi* makes her different from Mani Kaul's *Balo* who becomes less resistant as the film *Uski Roti* approaches its end.

The first occasion of submission before the authority happens to be the scene where *Balo*'s sister reports the villager's effort to molest her for the first time. *Balo*, instead of taking any action, promises her sister that she would tell this to *Suchcha Singh*. Here, *Balo* is being kept silent by Mani Kaul with an intention so that the audience would remember the wrongdoings against these unprivileged people for a longer time. She awaits, like the characters in the theatre of the absurd—the moment of destiny when silence would speak the loudest to affect the patriarchy with a Beckettian motif as if 'pouring into the play like water into [a] sinking ship' (McDonald 150).

A Reversal of Fortune

A comparison between the two scenes and their subtle analysis would make the director's vision clear. One scene occurs in the middle of the film:

> *A Road. Late Morning. Suchcha Singh stops the bus, and Balo is standing near the driver window.*
> *They converse.*
> *Balo*: *Suchcha Singh*, take the bread.
> *Suchcha*:Get away.
> *Balo*: Listen to me for one minute. I'm late because of some unavoidable circumstances.
> *Suchcha*: I'm running out of time. Get out of my sight.
> *Silence…*
> *Suchcha looks out of the window and ignores Balo.*
> *Balo*: You have the right to get angry at me, but please keep the bread. When you come home on Tuesday, I'll tell you everything in detail.
> *Suchcha* (ignoring her) to the conductor: Did you get the cycle unloaded?
> *Conductor (while getting on the bus)*: Let's go.
> *Silence…*
> *Suchcha (starting the bus)*: Don't wait for me on Tuesday.

The bus leaves and Balo awaits… (Kaul 00: 49: 11- 00:50:36).

In the described scene, *Balo* does not mention the reason for getting late even once. She uses silence as her weapon to combat her situation. All sorts of reasoning appear useless to her. She knows that she does not belong to the status where she can debate based on a rational proposition. Her only escape remains in the arrival of the right moment of destiny—coincidence.

> *In the last scene, the enduring power of silence disturbs Suchcha Singh in a positive way:*
> *Same Place. Night. Extreme close up of Suchcha Singh's face followed by his conversation with Balo.*
> *Suchcha (putting his hand on Balo's shoulder)*: You did not go home till now!
> *Balo*: How could I go without giving you the bread! Have you been waiting here for long?
> *Suchcha*: No. Just parked the bus. Are you okay? You kept waiting for me only to give the bread! Okay, give me the bread and go home.
> *Silence…*
> *Extreme close up. The camera focuses on Balo's eyes.*
> *Suchcha Singh takes bread from her. Hands meet. Close up of the hands.*
> *Silence.*
> *Suchcha Singh approaches the bus. Before getting into the bus, he looks at Balo's Face.*
> *Balo*:Will you come home on Tuesday?
> *Suchcha*:Yes. Do you want me to bring something from the city?
> *Balo*:No.
> *Suchcha*:What did you want to tell me last time?
> *Balo*: Nothing important. I will tell you when you come home on Tuesday.
> *Suchcha*: Go. You have to walk two miles.
> *He starts the bus. A close-up of his face. Another shot (an extreme close-up focusing on the eyes of Balo.)* (Kaul 01:35:17-01:39:00).

A shift from the first scene to the second describes the systematic self-realisation of Suchcha Singh. Mani Kaul followed what he had once said about the film, "It should create its own rhythms." (New York 5) He has created a rhythm of his own which has a two-fold effect—on both the audience and on *Suchcha Singh*. The movie seems to echo Dr Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), where all good things happen to be reserved for people who wait. *Balo* does wait for good things. It is, perhaps, because of the portrayal of *Balo*, the silent woman, that Mani Kaul won the following praise:

> I began to understand the hypnotic spell his Uski Roti had cast on me, which I had seen before I worked in Ashadh. The film was without sound then. Its frames were inspired by Amrita Sher-Gil's paintings but what made them come alive was Mani's superb control over rhythm. They did not come alive to quotidian, mundane rhythms, but moved to the beat of a deeper dimension of time, that is almost imperceptible. It is the rhythm of centuries of chaini life, like the vilampat of a bada khayal, where the urban rushed split second has not entered. (Khopkar 30)

Decoding Balo's Silence

The National Theatre premiered the theatrical version of the novel *Frankenstein* (1818) on 30 April 2020. The words spoken in the performance were hardly a tenth of those used in the novel. The depth of the message we get through the visuals is far better than the one we get while reading it. If it is a passive character that generates an active audience, we can depict the passivity through the visual mediums with more accuracy and clarity. Kaul's heroines always seek a greater purpose whenever they swear to be silent. For instance, the bride in the movie *Duvidha* (1973) does not clarify who happens to be her real husband while being aware of the secret at the same time. She remains silent. The bride's choice to be silent becomes the reason for her escape as it occurs in the case of *Balo*. Kaul's adaptation of Mohan Rakesh's *Uski Roti* aids his mission by being highly constructive and political as Ferguson propounded in his paper "Silence: A Politics." The implied silence in the film through the character of *Balo* succeeds in producing unrest in the audience as well as in the patriarchal society. The film showcases the effect of—what happens when we do something deliberately that we are supposed to do forcibly. *Balo*, who is otherwise not left with much space to explain her position throughout the film, chooses deliberate silence which is like 'water in a sinking ship', and consequently, a resistance against vicious patriarchy is engendered. Thus, serious scrutiny of the use of silence in *Uski Roti* reveals Balo's determination in expressing her tolerance and patience in showcasing her resistance. Her silence can also be understood as a weapon to reclaim her husband though in the typical Indian way. In addition, her silence vehemently rebuffs the patriarchal order unable to extract the implication of subdued silences that women, in general, have been habituated with. The film, thus, is an exegesis of silence that ordinary mortals most often skip over, creating an opportunity for filmmakers/directors like Mani Kaul to unravel the threads of thoughts embedded within.

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Marriage across the Seven Seas: The Representation of South Asian Women in Arranged Marriages in Diasporic Cinema

Aditi Paul
Research Scholar
Department of English
Gharuan, Mohali (Punjab) India
sandhuaditi007@gmail.com

Dr. Nipun Kalia
Associate Professor
Department of English
Gharuan, Mohali (Punjab) India
nipun.uila@cumail.in

Abstract

Cinema has been an important tool in highlighting the world's changing trends. It also brings forth the impact these trends have on the lives of ordinary masses. The effects of globalisation, which has led to dislocations, migrations, and post-colonial implications, are the subtext of Diasporic cinema. This paper considers films directed by diasporic directors of Indian origin, Gurinder Chadha and Mira Nair. The women in these films are portrayed as the agents struggling to bring change in the norms and codes of conduct framed to reflect Indianness in the foreign land. The paper presents how directors like Chadha and Nair, through movies, try to represent South Asian women and claim their existence in the diaspora. They use arranged marriages and love relationships as a medium to present the gender disparity faced by the female characters. The female protagonists in these films try to overcome the misconceptions about South Asian women or the South Asian Subcontinent that the orientalist puts forward. The films directed by these women directors propose new post-colonial models that highlight the new roles that female protagonists are opting for in diasporic cinema. Further, the films also reflect the gender and racial differences women suffer in the UK, USA, and the Asian subcontinent.
Keywords: Culture, Cinema, Gender, Feminism, Marriage, Diaspora

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Introduction

The second half of the 20th century referred to as “the century of migration", has witnessed international migrations due to globalization, geopolitics, and the enhancement of transnational media. These migrations have often resulted in hybrid ethnicities that have disrupted the cultural and social practices of the societies they have habited. Diaspora space is gendered as well as stereotyped. It is considered gendered as women are subject to economic, political, cultural, and social pressures that function as interconnected systems

and dominate them based on gender, class, and sex (hooks 21). The representation of South Asian marriages in films makes cinema an essential medium for understanding cultural phenomena. The wedding attires, rituals, and ceremonies not only showcase the fusion of western and eastern cultures but also helps in understanding people's changing lives and identities over time. For instance, Nicole Kidman's portrayal of a Hindu bride in *Moulin Rouge* (2001) or Harvey Nichols' Department Stores in London (decorated with Punjabi wedding attires) gives a realistic glimpse of Indian brides in diasporic space.

The paper aims to recognize how traditions, weddings, and love relationships emerge as an important base for cultural demarcation among people from different continents, bringing forth cultural hybridity and discords deeply embedded in the Asian diaspora. The paper intends to examine similar situations in the films directed by South Asian filmmakers Gurinder Chadha and Mira Nair. Their entire body of work is about diaspora and examines conflicts like gender inequality, identity crisis, race, and cultural representation. The diasporic films directed by them showcase the oppression of women at different sites and attempt to resolve disputes related to South Asian distinctiveness in the psyche of ordinary people. Furthermore, the select films discuss women's representation in marriage and the opportunities available to South Asian women in the diaspora. These films also try to eradicate the subjugation of women in diasporic marriages, giving them space to be heard.

Representation of Women in the Diasporic Cinema

"Diaspora Space" highlights the uniqueness of the diasporic intricacy (Brah 34). The Diaspora space can be regarded as a 'composite formation' (Brah 196), embracing hybridity in a more composed form and constantly struggling for existence. The hybrid identities in the context of South Asian women, as showcased in diasporic films, can be understood by analyzing the female characters in *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993), directed by Gurinder Chadha. According to Avtar Brah, these women characters are living in a diaspora space trying to bring convergence between economic, political, and cultural variables on one hand and gender, race, class, and religion on the other (Brah 24). The characters spend their entire life overcoming cultural shock, homesickness, and feeling of alienation. These underpinned issues of space not only highlight the subject of post-colonial female migration but also exemplify multiple sites of marginalization experienced by Asian women in a foreign land. Firstly, by relocating and adjusting to a foreign country, secondly by being South Asian, and thirdly, by facing subjugation in matrimonial alliances.

The film showcases one day trip organized by Birmingham-based Saheli Women's Group. The film uses travel as a trope to engage the audience with the migrant's relationships and revive their nostalgic feelings. The picturesque view of the carnival at Blackpool serves as an interstitial space overlapping with different cultural positionalities. The boardwalk full of strangers, presenting a slice of life with games, live performances by male strippers, karaoke, and elders cheering on "Birdie song", emerges as a locus "where the native is as much a diasporian as the diaporian is the native" (Brah 209).

In the film, Asha's character is portrayed as a devout Hindu and a lover of Bollywood

movies. The film's opening scene uses full-angle and close-ups shots to demonstrate Asha's hallucinations. She encounters an effigy of the Indian god Vishnu lamenting the phrase "Duty, Honour, Sacrifice", further followed by her images showcasing her as a faithful wife and tender mother. The image of god in the frame appears as a patriarchal surveillance, commanding her to uphold her Indian values. Further, zooming in and out of flashing lights and fast cuts creates a sense of confusion, emphasizing the transnational overlapping of cultures. Asha can be seen tripping over commodities of mundane use, such as; Coke cans, Bollywood film flyers, ice cream cones and VHS tapes. The scene laments the change in diasporic subjects and their homelands due to globalization.

Asha leads a monotonous life by running her convenience shop. She feels excited when she meets a charming English actor in Blackpool, but she decides to remain faithful to her husband. In the film, Asha tells Ambrose, the English gentleman, "I wanted to become a Bollywood actress, but after getting married, I quitted my singing and acting" (Bhaji 0:50:07-11). While bidding farewell to the English man in Blackpool, Asha's aspirations of becoming a Bollywood actress are revealed; she grumbles, saying, "Maybe I should get back to my education and change my mind" (Bhaji 1:05:04-9). At this time, Asha comes to terms with the gender restrictions being imposed both on herself and other females in her community depicting that hybridity reflects diaspora in the South Asian context, leading to 'diasporic Indian plurality' (Sahoo 12).

Asha's fantasy is portrayed in the scene; where she sings with her 'lover'; the disruption in the scene occurs on realizing that the lover is Ambrose. The Bollywood motif of rain dance songs gets ruined with the close-up shot showing the brown makeup being washed off Ambrose's face. These fantasy sequences using Bollywood tropes help Asha to express her secret desires and explore her romantic association with Ambrose. She steps outside the traditional boundaries and discovers her female subjectivity outside gender construction. She rejects Ambrose, who had tried to colonize her, considering her Indianness as exotic.

Moreover, the scenes in the film compare Bollywood settings with English theatre. The day at the seaside compares Bombay and Blackpool. Lastly, the events on the boardwalk mark a close association between Blackpool's festivities and the Diwali festival in India. These carnivalesque assemblies of motifs in the film draw an association between east and west. Thus, it renders a constant reminder of the motherland and shapes gendered (female) identity for the diaspora.

Furthermore, diasporic films depict the characters' post-colonial experiences due to cultural interactions between the UK, the US, and the South Asian subcontinent. *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993) and *Bend it like Bekham* (2002) by Gurinder Chadha depict the first and second generations of immigrants born in the UK or from the South Asian continent. As in *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993), Harshida wanted to be an artist, yet she excelled in school, aspiring to fulfil her parents' dream by enrolling in a medical school. At the same time, her affair with an Afro-Caribbean lad exhibits the breaking of moral codes and patriarchal taboos regarding chastity, virginity, and interracial relationships. Harshida hid her love affair as her community considered that an 'arranged marriage' ensures the race's 'purity'. When women in Harshita's community discovered her illegitimate pregnancy, she was insulted by statements such as,

"We thought that you could cure our community [referring to her prospects to become a doctor], but you only infect us" (Bhaji 1:30:10-12). This, indicates that the domination of the patriarchal setup in the diasporic space makes South Asian women dependent on males for their career and marriage prospects. In another scene, Pushpa, an elderly aunt, calls Hashida a 'whore' and comments, "this country has cost us our children" (Bhaji 1:40:7-12). Indicating that patriarchy has been supported and sustained by the elder female community members, thus rendering gender biasedness over generations.

Gurinder Chadha, through the characters, gives the first-hand experience of dual oppression. Firstly, by British society,(instance when white men mock the Saheli bus at the gas station). Secondly, by the Indian diasporic community (forcing women to pursue education or to get married as per the norms of South Asian society). The film also engages the audience with an ambivalent use of incomplete acts of resistance and acceptance. On the one hand, women in the film resist English culture (Women desiring to eat their ethnic food at Blackpool). On the other hand, they embrace it unexpectedly (During the trip, Pushpa, an older woman, dances with a male stripper).

Diasporic films like *Monsoon Wedding* (2001), *Bend it Like Bekham* (2004) demonstrate traditional matchmaking as prevalent in the Indian subcontinent. These films exemplify the ties the South Asian diaspora strives to maintain with the Indian subcontinent, expecting South Asian women to devoutly uphold the traditions and customs observed in their home countries. In Gurinder Chaddha's *Bend it Like Beckham*(2002), the mis-en-scene depicting Bhamra's drawing room where Guru Nanak's picture is displayed and the wedding scenes where characters wear Indian attire are low-angle camera shots. These scenes use a single camera angle to make Indian traditions/values look powerful and dominating in the western country. Using soccer as the setting, Chadha examines the life of Jessmendir "Jess," a young British girl with Punjabi ancestry, whose passion for the game and her romantic relationship with a white Irish coach force her to struggle between her Punjabi and British identities. Jess was not allowed to play soccer; it was viewed as a masculine sport, and her father instructed her to behave like a 'proper Indian woman'. In the film, Jess refuses to cook Punjabi food, to which her mother rhetorically questions, "What kind of family would want a daughter-in-law who can kick a football around but can't make round chapatis?" (Bend it Like Beckham 0:30:5 -10). These scenes indicate that immigrant married women are also expected to behave, dress and perform all the duties in the same fashion as native Asian women.

Representation of Marriages in Diasporic Cinema

In the Diaspora communities, weddings and love relationships are identity tropes showcasing cultural negotiation between diaspora spaces, often resulting in conflicts. There is a remarkable depiction of rituals that adhere to a social code of conduct established by patriarchy. These customs underline a gender conflict, where it has often been observed that Asian female migrants occupy an inferior position compared to male migrants. As stated by Luce Irigaray, 'Marriage is a system of exchange that has been set up by patriarchal societies . . . modalities of productive work that is recognized, valued, and rewarded in these societies as men's business' (Irigaray 174). This brings forth an insight that a man has the free will to

choose a woman among the variety of prevalent options, whereas a woman must wait for the right kind of man to be chosen. A woman has been denied the will to select her future companion. As asserted by Monika Ali for the character Nazneen in *Brick Lane* (2002), 'My fate does not belong to me. It is my husband's; it is my family's, and it is god's (Ali 4).

Immigrant wives are forced to live a submissive and subservient life in a foreign land. For instance, in *Bhaji on Beach* (1993), elderly women believed that Ginder was seeking a divorce from her husband as her matrimonial alliance was a love match. In contrast, if she had arranged marriage, she would have championed arcane in "traditional" Indian values. Ginder's Englishness and dark complexion secludes her from other women, "she is placed on what she herself refers to as the 'social rejects bench'" (Hussain 75). This clearly states that the married South Asian women who migrated to a foreign land, in a way, become Orientalized (Said 29). The film portrays the struggle of South Asian women making an effort to oppose the oppression of white racist society and their community. Despite having a strong urge to break free from traditional and cultural constraints, they adhere to traditional principles highlighting the 'complex identifications from where the Indian diaspora emerges' (Moorti 358).

In Moonsoon Wedding (2001), Nair displays an arranged matrimonial alliance between a US-based NRI and a Punjabi girl residing in Delhi. The film destroys the pre-existing image of India as a traditional land with ancient customs and beliefs. Instead, it tries to picture India in a postmodern globalized world, where cell phones and emails go hand in hand with age-old traditions. The camera zooms on television screens and monitors to showcase emerging media. One of the scenes in the movie illustrates a talk show holding a debate on film censorship. Nair uses wide camera angles showcasing the guests debating the clash of modernity with Indian morality and tradition. Further, the social mobility of the rural population due to consumerism introduces cultural commodification. Thus, Individual desires were given more preference than social desires, and usage of credit cards attained credence over financial conservatism. The songs from popular Hindi films that were played during wedding celebrations become 'In world music of the film, further dramatizing "how a commercialized, hybridized, and low cultural form such as Bombay cinema operates as the site of a collective Indian identity throughout the diaspora." (Prasad 235).

In the film, Aditi portrays a new generation of Indian women living a dual life. She tries to reconcile with her personal desires as well as her parent's wishes at the same time. Prior to the wedding, Aditi was involved in an incipient relationship, which is not accepted in Indian society. She wanted to get married to an NRI residing in Houston Texas just to shape a prosperous future for herself. However, as she became determined to start a new life and break her relationship with a married man, she confided in her fiancée Hemant about her secret love affair. Nair introduces the notion of arranged marriage, which oppresses women and creates a stereotypical image of Asian women. Arranged marriage, according to her, is a tradition that should not belittle women's will and desire. Aditi transgresses by accepting arranged marriage as her fate and a valid option offering her respect and stability for the future. However, she emerges as a modern woman who accepts confronting her past before marriage, regardless of the consequences. The film acknowledges empowering females making them aware of possible other realities.

Interracial Relationships and Marriages in Diasporic Cinema

Stuart Hall states that cinema is not "a second-order mirror held up to reflect what already exists, but… that form of representation which is able to constitute us new kinds of subjects"(221). In the same pretext, films by Mira Nair take female subjects into discourse and stage Indian traditions that depict cultural hybridities. On the one hand, the females in the films are modern and traditional, whereas, on the other, they are westernized and Indian. Nair's *Mississippi Masala* (1991) is a cinematic portrayal of love relationships in a diasporic space, showcasing an affair between a black man and a woman of South Asian origin. These romantic relationships burden South Asian women, leaving them only two options. They must either deal with family expectations and cultural norms or reject these expectations by submitting to their own will. Thus, the protagonists in Nair's film choose the second option, attempting to empower South Asian women within the discourse of cultural hybridity. The underwater interstice of diaspora due to cultural conflicts and contacts serves as an important tool in shaping identity.

Further, the film reveals continuous transformation, creating diasporic identities that "is always being reconstituted, always in the making" (Moorti 372). The film depicts an interracial romance between an Asian woman and an African American man. Mina has never visited India and considers her hybrid distinctiveness as a Masala experience (masala is an amalgamation of unspecific spices). Being estranged from her Indian roots, she sensed a shared past with African Americans. Due to the interaction of their respective cultures, Mina and Demetrius show the transforming potential of a culturally hybrid identity. Mina faces dual subjugation as a female, firstly for being an Asian woman and secondly for being married to an African man. This indicates that gender bias has been prevalent for decades, yet the existing generation could not eliminate obsolete notions.

Conclusion

The protagonists in Mira Nair and Gurinder Chadha's films are subaltern Indian females. They are presented in popular cinema as multicultural entities and explore generational differences by clarifying the divergent perspectives and understanding of race and communities. These South Asian women are empowered to stand up for themselves in the new space created by the diaspora. Female protagonists in the above-discussed films, such as Aditi, Asha, Jess, and Mina challenge the dominance imposed on women due to the institutionalization of marriage. These characters attempt to subvert the gender conflict along with the patriarchal and racial code of conduct imposed on them by arranged marriages. Arranged marriages depicted in the select films try to bring down the assumed submissive role that Asian bride has to play and further limit western evaluation of eastern cultural tradition. In the same context, Jigna Desai states that cinematic narratives "attempt to disrupt South Asian gender normativities of heterosexuality through challenging the dominant gendered

ideologies such as female chastity and virginity, multiracial romance, and arranged marriages" (202). Gurinder Chadha and Mira Nair's films show how South Asian weddings and interracial relationships limit women's ability to choose their marriage partners and force them to adhere to the traditional norms of arranged marriages. South Asian women of the second or third generation born in the west cannot make their own decisions and are forced to conform to their parent's expectations. According to the directors, the diaspora space is governed by sexist and racist principles, leaving the only possibility of subverting them inherently. Films directed by them give a cinematic representation of women in diaspora space, further identifying common possibilities and can correlate with one another. This results in a transformation in which women try to support and nurture one another, which leads to empowerment.

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A Critique of Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand* as a Feminist Metafiction

Dr. Sanket Kumar Jha
Assistant Professor of English
University Department of English
Lalit Narayan Mithila University
Darbhanga (Bihar) India
sanketjha007@gmail.com

Abstract

Tomb of Sand *(2022) created history as the first novel translated from Hindi to win the International Booker Prize 2022. Though Ret Samadhi (2018) received a lukewarm response yet, the translation by Daisy Rockwell as* Tomb of Sand *was appreciated by the Booker committee for being "an urgent yet engaging protest against the destructive impact of borders, whether between religions, countries or genders" (Tomb of Sand/The Booker Prizes, 2022). As the first chapter declares, the novel tells a story that "has a border and women who come and go as they please" (11). Although the Partition of the Indian Subcontinent and its tragic aftermath form the story's background, it also highlights several issues concerning modern lives, including the roles of gender, class, nationality, religion, administration and several others. It interprets the meaning of "borders" from a feminine perspective and juxtaposes it against the male-centric understanding of the term. Though the story is tragic, the tone is playful, and we are reminded of its position as a story throughout the novel. Apart from presenting a realistic picture of life, the novel "draws attention to its status as an artefact to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (Waugh 39). This article discusses these and other features of* Tomb of Sand *(2022) that characterise it as a feminist metafiction in the tradition of Doris Lessing and Margaret Atwood.*
Keywords: Tomb of Sand, Feminist Metafiction, Partition, Intertextuality, Parody, Irony

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Introduction

The term "metafiction" was coined by William Gass in the late 1960s to designate postmodern fictions that were somehow about fiction itself. He used this term to represent works written in defiance of the contemporary norms of fiction writing. Gas argued that novelists such as John Barth, Robert Coover, Thomas Pynchon and John Hawkes drove inspiration from the works of Beckett, Borges, and Nabokov and challenged the notions of realistic representation and verisimilitude.

Raymond Federman writes, "the only fiction that still means something today is that kind of fiction that tries to explore the possibilities of fiction; the kind of fiction that challenges the tradition that governs it; the kind of fiction that constantly renews our faith in man's imagination not in man's distorted vision of reality—that reveals men's irrationality rather than man's rationality" (37). However, as Christgau points it out metafiction was seen as a

territory of "pretentious white American men" (16); hence, the term was not applied to the works of women writers.

Gayle Greene argues that feminist writers utilised metafiction to challenge the conventions of literary discourse. In her famous work *Changing the Story: Feminist Fiction and the Tradition* (1991), Greene describes the 1970s as the period when a new type of "feminist metafiction" emerged. She discusses the works of novelists like Doris Lessing, Margaret Atwood, Erica Jong, Gail Godwin, Margaret Drabble and others to claim that the female characters depicted by them represent the author's reaction against what they consider an imposed literary tradition. Greene (1991) argues that metafiction "is a powerful tool of feminist critique" (23) as it draws attention to the structures of fiction and challenges the conventionality of the codes that govern human behaviour. She considers Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962) as "the most influential novel written by a woman in this century" (26), highlighting the feminist mode of metafiction.

In her *Preface to The Golden Notebook* (1977), Lessing herself corroborates Greene's viewpoint. She claims *the critics misread the Golden Notebook* (1962) as they could not interpret her mockery of the conventional way of storytelling. The intentional incoherence and fragmentation in the novel's plot were criticised as its flaws because it was being evaluated from the standards of New Criticism. Lessing challenges the critical opinions of her work "What they do very well is to tell the writer how the book or play accords with current patterns of feeling and thinking-the climate of opinion (Lessing 169).

Fabulation, Self-reflexivity and Playfulness

Metafiction questions the notions of literature as a story and attempts to undermine the author's role as narrator. Motivated by the notion that literature is a creative work, it employs fabulation. According to Scholes (1975), fabulation "is fiction that offers us a world clearly and radically discontinuous from the one we know, yet returns to confront that known world in some cognitive way" (2). Hence the traditional notions of mimesis and verisimilitude are subverted. In *Tomb of Sand*, violation of the narrative structure by the narrator is frequently encountered: "In a story, you make whatever you want [to] happen" (Shree 133)

Like all metafiction, *Tomb of Sand* (2022) is self-conscious about writing and its position as fiction. It is divided into three parts: M.A.'S BACK, SUNLIGHT and BACK TO THE FRONT. These parts are further subdivided into various chapters. However, this division is idiosyncratic as some chapters contain several pages while others have a few sentences or words only. For instance, chapter 74 in the second part of the novel contains two words only*:* "Rosie Died".

The novel begins with a statement: "A tale tells itself. It can be complete, but also incomplete, the way all tales are." (13). This opening statement is further corroborated by the intermittent authorial interruptions throughout the novel. Shree proposes to tell a story of "two women and one death" and, in a playful tone, remarks, "How nicely we will get on, us and them, once we all sit down together!" (14). The first chapter ends with the author's

remark: "So there's no harm in starting the story right here, that is, the way we're doing it right now" (14). The authorial presence is omnipresent, interpolating the narrative with its paradoxical statements and observations. The narrator frequently reminds the readers that they are reading a work of fiction. Comments like "Enough. Let's get back. Although the tale has no need for a single stream. It is free to run, flow." (43) are excellent instances of "intense self-reflexivity" and "parodic intertextuality" (Hutcheon 280) of a metafiction. Such seemingly innocuous authorial insertions are, in fact, a mockery of the conventional mode of storytelling; the novelists desire for a realistic portrayal of life and to achieve what Coleridge termed as a "willing suspension of disbelief" (365). Amid the narration, these observations by the narrator create an atmosphere of contrast in the narrative and bring forth postmodernist scepticism to the fore. They also add new dimensions and add the authorial point of view to the various scenes. Such interferences corroborate what Brian McHale (2003) refers to as postmodernist fiction's 'dominant' mode. They also reveal the postmodern ontological uncertainty about the world projected by the text.

> The "world" in which the text situates itself is the "world" of discourse, the "world" of texts and intertexts. This "world" has direct links to the world of empirical reality, but it is not itself that empirical reality. It is a contemporary critical truism that realism is really a set of conventions, that the representation of the real is not the same as the real itself. (Hutcheon 6)

Tomb of Sand (2022) employs a unique narrative style embellished with puns, paradoxes, personifications, polyphony and playfulness. On the one hand, it frequently uses dialect-specific Hindi lexicons like *bharhara, makuni, and guramma*. On the other hand, it plays with English phrases*:* "Bells and whistles. These are things that pierce not just the air but the heart, and bump into the body" (165). These stylistic features lend the novel a unique style and an unprecedented vigour. Its narrative frequently diverts in wordplays like "*Gaya Bhi Gaya*—Gaya is also gone. And what of Bodh Gaya? When the brains—the bodh—drained away, it too was gone—*voh bhi Gaya"* (167). In the first part of the novel Bade and Bahu refer to one another as "D"—an abbreviation for darling. Later on, this D metamorphosed into a duffer. Though the story is tragic, the tone is playful, and throughout the novel, we are reminded of its position as a story whose fate depends on the whims of its author. One of the most striking features of this novel is the chorus of multiple voices. Anything and anyone - birds, butterflies, even doors, walls, roads, and a character who later apologises for joining in the story, narrates some part of the tale. The narration moves from a prison in Khyber, Pakistan, to a cricket field in Sri Lanka, where the bowler narrates part of the story. It is interesting to note that an entire chapter is dedicated to the assembly of crows debating on the issue of global warming:

> One young jackanapes, rather bored in his youthful zeal, as well as a bit self-enchanted, asked with curiosity (but also just to rile), Nina who? Nino, corrected the one next to him. . . . (Shree 374)

Patriarchy, Class and Gender

Tomb of Sand (2022) depicts several lives but at the forefront are an 80-year-old

woman called "Ma" and her bohemian daughter "Beti." The first part, "Ma's Back," begins in the wake of a death. "His presence was still felt, even in death. But regardless of whether or not he had died, it seemed his widow certainly had. At least that's how she looked as she lay in her room." (15). The family lives in a palatial government quarter that they will have to leave after Bade's retirement. Bade throws a farewell party on the eve of his retirement. The frequent mention of Ma during the party, sitting all alone in her room facing the wall, heightens the irony of the situation. After the farewell party is over, Ma is found missing. She is later found by a passerby who takes her to a nearby police station, and she is returned to her home. Even at such pathetic moments, the author's playfulness uniquely appeals to the novel. For instance, the description of several methods by which a missing object can be searched under "One method is to tap the quilt, twist it like it is dough that's been kneaded, then pat it gently" (183) is both ironic and playful.

Shree's awareness of the caste and class divide is apparent through the names of the characters. While the upper-class household members are called by names like "Bade", "Beti", and "Bahu", the domestic help has their names and personalities analysed, played upon and desiccated. The depiction of 'Ma' as a traditional woman devoted to her husband and her role in the family is contrasted with her friendship with Rosie and her quest for Anwar—her former husband in Pakistan. The differential treatment of a boy and a girl in a patriarchal setting is unmistakable. Bade—Ma's son, is a civil servant on the verge of retirement and considers himself the master of the house. He follows the tradition of his forefathers in ruling over the household. Beti—Ma's daughter, on the other hand, is not allowed to live a life according to her will:

> Shouting is a tradition, an ancient custom upheld by eldest sons. In a masterful style. The practice is only superficial; it doesn't matter if eldest sons truly feel such ferocity in their hearts, but whatever their feelings, they must be cloaked in this guise (45).

The second part of the novel 'Sunlight' begins with a description of Beti's apartment. The story has now shifted to Beti's house because Ma (now Amma) has come to live with Beti. Shree highlights the disabling impact of patriarchal supremacy on the lives of a woman by contrasting Ma's life under two different circumstances. How the first-generation feminists ensured the participation of women in several affairs is hinted at by this humorous depiction of "an elderly crowess" who "had been one of the most badass feminists of her time, one who had fought and won the right for mothers to attend meetings and also take part in community decisions" (378).

It is here that Rosie Bua—a transgender person, gives Amma a new life. The irony of the situation is obvious. Ma, who got disabled in the household of her son, regains her vitality with the help of her daughter and a transgender person. Following the bits of advice by Rosie, Amma tries new dresses and new makeup. She begins challenging the established notions of a woman's role in the family and society. Beti's refutation of middle-class hypocrisies about transgender people is contrasted with her perplexity regarding her mother's friendship with a transgendered person:

Ma sat with her arms and legs stretched out. The paste was smeared here and there on her body. The droplets of garlic stuck to her skin. Insides out, flipped up and over, inside

faucets and entrails all gushing blood breath life. All exposed. Beti did not like Ma sitting around exposed like that (Shree 309).

Rosie, an altruist, is killed by her tenants, who did not like a *hijra* residing in a neighbourhood of decent people. The apathy of society towards a transgender person is revealed after her death. The investigation of her murder was cast-off as she was considered a "faker" by the police. The repression of voices in the contemporary age has been sarcastically brought forward by the inherent analogy between human beings and crows: "The era of debate was still extant among the crows, and conversations proceeded boldly. (Shree 373).

Intertextuality

Intertextuality is one of the characteristic features of a metafiction. Linda Hutchinson, in her seminal essay "Historiographic Metafiction Parody and the Intertextuality of History" (1989), writes:

> In historiographic metafiction, these other art forms parodically cite the intertexts of both the "world" and art and, in so doing, contest the boundaries that many would unquestioningly use to separate the two. In its most extreme formulation, the result of such contesting would be a "break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable." (7)

The third part of this novel, BACK TO THE FRONT, opens with this remark*: Here we are at Wagah, where the tale is drama, and the story is Partition.* Shree claims space among the Partition writers by paying her dues to several Partition writers. She depicts Joginder Pal, Manto, Rahi Masoom Raza, Intizar Hussain, Sobti, Khushwant Singh, Bhisham Sahni, Ramanand Sagar, Balwant Singh, Manzoor Ehtesham, Rajinder Singh Bedi and several others sitting in a row, at the Wagah border. In her translator's note, Rockwell corroborates it:

> Throughout *Tomb of Sand*, reference is made to many of the great Partition authors in Hindi and Urdu, especially in the chapter that introduces the third section, when many of these writers come alive at the Wagah border between India and Pakistan." (Shree: translator's note).

Several other intertextual references include Borges (Part II, Ch-62) and Paul Zachariah (Part II, Ch-79). After the death of Rosie, Ma starts clamouring for a passport. She wishes to visit Pakistan: Pakistan. "Pakistan? Pakistan! Why fling Ma into the swirl of the noisy slogans in Krishna Sobti's *A Gujarat Here, A Gujarat There*?" (Shree 613). Shree's (2018) conception in this regard is worth noting:

> No writer is as unique as she might like to believe! The writer's interior comprises a universe where there is constant shifting across available linguistic and cultural registers, historical moments, and much else. Bound to it, every writer also aspires to break free of that already-given universe. It is this aspiration and its manifestation which makes her somehow unique, even though she is not! (Pratilipi: para 4)

In his pivotal text, *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard (2008) points out the adverse impact of technological developments on the art of narration. He defines postmodern as

"incredulity toward metanarratives" (5) and maintains that the postmodern condition favours short narratives representing individual points of view. In this part of the novel, several stories are set within stories and are told from different points of view. Ma and Beti visit Pakistan and start searching for Anwar, Ma's Pakistani *Shauhar*. Ma narrates her past to Beti in the Thar desert through different stories set in different periods of her life. Through these short stories, several past events, from love marriage to the Partition and its aftermaths, are brought forward. Several symbols constantly appearing in the novel, like the broken Buddha and Ma's whistling with Rosie, find their significance through these stories. The broken idol of Buddha is being claimed as *Pakistani* since it is from "*Sikri District Maidan, Khyber Pakhtunwa"* (23). On the other hand, Chanda, a lawful citizen separated from her husband during the Partition, is being denied her claim. She had assumed all her roles of a devoted wife and a dutiful mother under the patriarchal system she was thrown into. Once out of that system, her authentic self, her fond memories, begin to haunt her, and she changes. Her understanding of borders is a testimony to the feminine way of seeing things. Traditionally, borders have always been depicted as a source of hatred and enmity between two entities. However, for Ma, a border has altogether different connotations:

> What is a border? It's something that surrounds an existence; it is a person's perimeter. No matter how large, no matter how small. The edge of a handkerchief, the border of a tablecloth . . . A border does not enclose; it opens out. It creates a shape. It adorns an edge . . . A border stops nothing. It is a bridge between two connected parts. (Shree 652).

Later in the story, we find Amma visiting her former husband, Anwar, who is lying paralysed. Anwar speaks only one word "Forgiveness" which can be interpreted in several ways according to the context one takes. The narrative takes a tragic turn when Amma and Beti are shot in the dead of night. In the Epilogue, the story finds its way back to Bade's house—from where it had started. Once again, the novel plays with the time frame by obliterating the story's timeline: "Of what significance were eleven or twelve years when there had been centuries of experience? It did not matter if it had been twelve years or fifteen or sixteen; there was no need to count" (Epilogue).

Conclusion

Tomb of Sand (2022) can be compared to Gabriel García Márquez's novel *Love in Time of Cholera* (2003) in more ways than one. In *Love in Time of Cholera* (2003), Florentino Ariza waits fifty-one years, nine months, and four days to be with his beloved Fermina Daza. Similarly, in *Tomb of Sand*, Amma appears to be waiting for her lover Anwar throughout her married life. Both novels end tragically and employ a narrative style that is lyrical, humorous, playful and poetic.

William Somerset Maugham, in his influential work *Ten Novels and Their Authors* (1954), analyses the respective merits of ten highly acclaimed novels, including Henry Fielding's *The History of Tom Jones*, Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* and Tolstoy's *War and Peace* among others. He finds a widely exciting

theme, a coherent and persuasive story, unity of action, proper development of characters and above all, a capacity to entertain as the touchstone for a good novel. Although Maugham considers diversions and digressions as defects of a novel, he argues that "some of the novels that suffer from these defects are among the greatest that has ever been written." (56)

Despite its various twists and turns and a chorus of narrating voices that test the reader's intellectual responses and tolerance, *Tomb of Sand* (2022) is a feminist metafiction that raises several issues, from family life to the idea of a nation. Although the Partition of the Indian Subcontinent and its tragic aftermath form the story's background, yet it highlights several issues concerning modern lives, including the roles of gender, class, nationality, religion, administration and several others. It interprets the meaning of borders from a feminine perspective and juxtaposes it against the male-centric understanding of the term.

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Unveiling the Politics of Narration: A Foucauldian Discourse Analysis of Manto's "*Khol Do*"

Bijitha P
Research Scholar
Department of English
Christ University
Bangalore (Karnataka) India
bijithapnairbhoomika@gmail.com

Abstract

The year 1947, in Indian history, brings the reminiscence of brutal killings and sexual exploitation of both men and women. Among them, women are the targeted groups for abduction, rape and murder. Over time, this became a part of the literary narration. Similar to history, each literary story can utter the horrors of rape and female trauma. Most of the literary accounts of partition call attention to gender-based violence. The paper "Unveiling the Politics of Narration: A Foucauldian Discourse Analysis of Manto's Khol Do" discusses how Manto's narration establishes the hidden patriarchal ideology over the woman and her body. The study also focuses on how Manto's narration portrays women as the 'inferior other' and the production of patriarchal knowledge on women and their bodies.
Keywords: Discourse, Women, Body, Foucault, Patriarchy, Knowledge, Politics

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Introduction

The result of colonisation was the partitioning of India into two independent nations—The Hindu majority as India and the Muslim majority as Pakistan. This led to tremendous migration in human history (Khan et al. 517). Millions of Muslims trekked to Pakistan; on the other hand, Hindus and Sikhs migrated to India. As a result of the partition, the two nations started to see each other as rivals. The terrifying outbreak of war, bloodshed and conflict between the two countries became frequent; women were raped, and millions of people were killed. People's identities and existence were torn between the two countries. The separation created religious conflicts and individualism rather than harmony. Most literary works throw light on the after-effects of war (518).

The stories of partition mainly deal with atrocities against women. They became the target of horrifying violence, and their bodies became a site over which victory was sought. Women's sexuality is problematic, especially during the war (Das 43). This has influenced the writers very well. The authors started using these atrocities as the central theme in their works. The significant aspects of these writings were the migration experience and religion-wise categorization of humans into Hindus and Muslims. Khuswant Singh, Salman Rushdie, Bapsi Sidwa, Saadat Hasan Manto, and Intizar Hussain are well-known writers who wrote about the different dimensions of partition and its consequences. Among these, Saadat Hasan

Manto's stories dealt with marginalization and violence against women. He uses his fiction as a tool to showcase the pretentious nature of society.

Saadat Hasan Manto was an Urdu writer who authored several short stories, a novel, five series of radio play, three essays, and two collections of personal sketches. Through his writings, he revealed society's bitter realities and hard truths without any inhibition (Khan et al. 516). His famous stories include *Toba Tek Singh, Thanda Gosht, Khol Do, Kaali Shalwar and Hattak*. Among these, *Khol Do* deals with the horrors of war and the plight of a helpless father searching for his daughter. Manto realistically depicts the horrors of war and division by pointing out the sufferings of women. The article "Testimony and the Urdu Troposphere in Manto's 'Khol Do " talks about how women's bodies are subjected as a form of power which is characterised by the patriarchal set up by the society and how their bodies are influenced by the authority (Grewal 1-7).

In her essay "Body, Gender and Sexuality: Politics of Beings and Belongings", Sabala and Meena Gopal talk about the multiple performances of a female body for social and cultural needs. They become carriers of essential tradition and culture and are compared to the goddesses, symbolizing both nation and mother. A woman's honor represents the nation's honour (*stree ka samman*, *rashtra ka samman*) and must be safeguarded at any cost (43-51). The article "Nationalism and Madness: A Study of Saadat Hasan Manto's stories 'Toba Tek Singh', 'Thanda Gosht', and '*Khol Do*'" points out the underlined interactions of nationalism, identity and the body (Chhetry 306-309). In the article titled "Surfacing from within: fallen women in Manto's fiction", the author depicts Manto's story's dehumanized approach towards women (Kumar 155-160). The current study focuses on how Manto's narration establishes and indirectly imposes the patriarchal ideology over women and their bodies through a Foucauldian view.

The study is guided mainly by Carla Willig's idea on Foucauldian discourse analysis. Discourse is a term with multiple meanings. It may refer to the spoken word, utterances, or a specific set of statements within a given context, a regulated practice that accounts for several ideas (Griffin94). Foucauldian discourse analysis mainly deals with analyzing and critiquing the discursive worlds that people occupy and explore the implications of these on subjectivity and experience (Willig 34). Carla Willig points out six stages to analyze a discourse from a Foucauldian point of view. Here this study focuses on how Manto depicts the subject of the story, that is, Sakina, the way she is constructed and positioned and the aspects of patriarchal knowledge, which is produced through a male narration. The study also uses Kimberly Crenshaw's idea of 'Intersectionality' and Foucault's idea of power to substantiate that the female body is doubly marginalized due to the hidden power imposed by Manto's narration.

An Introduction to *Khol Do*

Khol Do is set during the riots of 1947. At the story's beginning, an old Muslim man, Sirajuddin, is found lying on the bare ground in a refugee camp on the Pakistani side of the border. On regaining consciousness, he recalls the riots that took his wife's life while they were travelling along with their daughter Sakina from one side of Punjab to the other. He looks all around for his daughter, but she is nowhere to be found. He recalls how her Dupatta

(a long scarf) had fallen on the ground, and he had stopped to pick it up. While trying to recollect the entire episode, he suddenly finds a piece of cloth in his pocket and recognizes it as Sakina's Dupatta, but she is missing. Unable to locate her, he seeks the help of eight "young men armed with guns" deployed as "volunteers" by the state to recover abducted women from the other side of the border. The narrative then shifts to the scene where we find Sakina with these young men on a lorry. On noticing that she had no dupatta to cover her bosom with, one of the men gives her his jacket so that she can protect herself.

Her new protectors now complete the act her father had failed to meet. In the camp, Sirajuddin gets the news that a young woman has been found unconscious by the railway tracks and brought to the camp hospital. He identifies the corpse-like body of the woman to be that of his daughter by the mole on her right cheek. "I am her father," he stammered. The doctor looked at the prone body and felt for the pulse. Then he said to the old man: "Open the window." The young woman on the stretcher moved slightly. Her hands groped for the cord which kept her salwar tied around her waist. With painful slowness, she unfastened it, pulled the garment down and opened her thighs. "She is alive. My daughter is alive," Sirajuddin shouted with joy. The doctor broke into a cold sweat. (Khan et al. 520).

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

In the ancient period, the space for women to write and explain their experiences was nil (MacCormick 1-4). The women depicted in the male writings were either sacrificing mothers, caring wives, domestic angels or witches. This was one of the reasons for the origin of feminism. The French critics and philosophers such as Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Helen Cixous critique the 'man-made language' and challenge phallocentrism. They assert that the language used by men to represent women is very submissive (Ram 110-111). Male narration uses women's experiences as limited, making them the tools to execute power. Those narrations create stereotypical women who are accepted by the patriarchal society. Hence the women in the male narratives are either submissive or mad (Foster 5). This paper analyses Manto's *Khol Do* in four parts to show how Manto's narration disseminates power and constructs knowledge of patriarchy on women and their bodies.

The Missing Females

In *Khol Do*, Manto mentions the disappearance of only females. The male members are the only survivors searching for their mothers, wives, or daughters.

> Someone was looking for his child, another for his mother, still another for his wife or daughter. (*English and Comparative Literary Studies* 74)

This statement may raise a question among readers: Why are only women missing? What about the men? Does the war point to women only? If so, what is unique about women? Does the partition only affect women and children? What about the menfolk? Does the division affect the menfolk? These are some of the questions that may come to a reader's mind. On the other hand, a close analysis of this statement shows that men are the only survivors and are physically strong enough to overcome the atrocities of the partition.

On the other hand, women are fragile and unable to survive. Also, this may show that the horror of partition severely affects women and children. They may be killed, kidnapped, raped, or even wiped out. This may bring another aspect that the women's bodies are constituted not as objects but as bodies which are easily accessible to do violence and impose power in the form of rape and molestation (Cahill 61). Hence, the hidden knowledge can be that women are inferior to men.

Glorification of Motherhood

A woman and her bodily identity are created based on dominant ideologies accepted by the patriarchy (Featherstone 107). One such instance is glorifying motherhood. Manto also repeated the same idea of patriarchal norms over women's bodies. It is evident in the following sentences.

> Sakina's mother was dead. She had died right in front of Sirajuddin's eyes. But where was Sakina? As she lay dying, Sakina's mother had urged him, don't worry about me. Just take Sakina and run. (75)

In the above sentences, Manto says that the mother is responsible for caring for the daughter. The female and her body are used as a metaphor to carry specific responsibilities imposed by Society (Sabala and Gopal 45). As per the societal norm, the burden of women is to get married and immediately give birth to predominantly male children. Those female bodies were considered significant and put on the pedestal of glory. On the other hand, if a woman gives birth to a female child, the woman and her body are considered inferior. And also, she is responsible for every matter for her daughter. Moulding the daughter to be obedient, loyal and good-mannered is a mother's duty. According to society, the term "mother" means somebody who sacrifices their life entirely for their children and the family. A mother is the epitome of love, concern, forgiveness, kindness and patience (45). Here Manto depicts a typical sacrificing mother who fulfils the norms of society. Sakina's mother is concerned about her daughter, even on her deathbed. Also, the mother may feel that she will be safe in her father's hands (any male member). Sirajuddin is the only male member of the family who may be physically and mentally strong enough to face any problematic situation. Additionally, she may have thought that her daughter being a female, requires more protection.

The Unsaid Power of Dupatta

Manto points out the need for a Muslim woman to wear a dupatta through the action of Sakina's father.

> Sakina was with him. Both of them were running barefooted. Her Dupatta slipped off, and when he stopped to pick it up, Sakina shouted, "Abba Ji, leave it!" He retrieved it anyway. Thinking about it, his eyes spontaneously drifted toward the bulge in his coat pocket. He plunged his hand into the pocket and took out the piece of cloth. It was the same Dupatta. There could be no doubt about it. (75)

Wearing a dupatta or veil is a symbolic representation of the gender seclusion of females. It also shows the modesty and control of power by one gender over the other. Covering a

woman's body symbolizes an underlying patriarchal dominant power. In the article "The geographies of veiling: Muslim Women in Britain", says that gender dress codes are prominent in the Islamic world. The veil dominated during the colonial period. Later it became a part of the culture and Society as a mark of gender identity (Dwyer142). Women are supposed to cover the breast, head or whole body, which is considered a social custom. Therefore, a woman is being oppressed under the garb of social custom. (Tuner 186). Sirajuddin's act of taking the fallen Dupatta in such a critical situation raises an important question: Who wants to wear the Dupatta? Is it Sakina or Sirajuddin?

Definition of Beauty

The definition of beauty is defined based on the colour: either white or black and body type: slim or fat. Class, caste, colour and gender are some societal yardsticks to measure an individual's beauty. For this reason, most Dalits in India were ill-treated and marginalized. As per the dominant ideology, fairness is considered beauty. The advertisement of cosmetics always propagates this notion (Malik 313). Sabala and Meena Gopal, in their article "Body, Gender and Sexuality: Politics of Being and Belongings", state how the medical field helps a woman to attain the ideal body, such as silicone implants for enhanced breasts, diets and hunger suppressing drugs to make slim, reconstruction of virginity by hymenoplasty, or invention of anti-ageing creams and hormone replacement for ageing women. (45)

Manto also asserts the same accepted dominant ideology of beauty by depicting Sakina through Sirajuddin's description: "She is fair and exceedingly pretty. She takes after her mother, not me. She is about seventeen, with big eyes and dark hair. She has a beautiful big mole on her right cheek" (English and Comparative Literary Studies 75). The line "she is fair" shows that Manto defines beauty based on colour. It is the accepted ideology that a woman is beautiful: if she is fair, she has big eyes, black hair and a black beauty spot on her cheeks. Her goodness is measured based on her way of interacting with others. A polite, humble and obedient woman/ daughter is considered a blessing and honour to the family.

Analysis and Findings

In his book *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Michel Foucault defines discourse as a way of thinking or a system of thoughts, ideas, and beliefs through language (11). These are represented through statements or images, creating metanarratives (11-12). Manto's narration is linear, and the ideas are obvious. But on the other hand, his narration problematizes the notion of women, body and gender.

The accepted norms of the dominant discourses are indirectly conveyed through Manto's narration. Through that, accepted knowledge is produced. But it is not directly mentioned anywhere in the story. Sakina, as a woman, is suffocated by patriarchal power. She is not in the centre because she is a woman, which is not a dominant gender according to patriarchy, she is a Muslim, which is not a majority group, and she got raped: hence she is not pure. In such an instance, she is doubly marginalized in Manto's narration. Manto tries to

represent Sakina as an 'inferior other'. The famous feminist critic Kimberly Crenshaw in her article "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality and Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women in Color", says that identities are constructed through multiple dimensions. It may be race, colour, gender, violence etc. (1241-1243). She uses this concept to understand how black women are doubly or triply marginalized due to these criteria. The women are at the intersection of all these and are thus sidelined. Similarly, Manto's story tries to propagate the dominant discourses on gender, the female body, women, and beauty through the character of Sakina to produce an accepted knowledge.

Discourse vs. Knowledge production- A Foucauldian Analysis

S. No.	Discourse	Probable Knowledge Produced
1	"Someone was looking for his wife, another for his mother, another for his daughter."	Women are physically fragile. Only men are the survivors, and they are the saviours of women. Women are inferior compared to Men
2	"Sakin's mother was dead, don't worry about me; just take Sakina and run."	Glorification of motherhood. Women are safe in the hands of men. Only men can protect her
3	"Her Dupatta was slipped of……He retrieved it"	Women should cover her body /head. It is a part of the custom. Women's bodies shouldn't be exposed.
4	"She is fair and exceedingly pretty. She takes after her mother, not me. She is about seventeen, with big eyes and dark hair. She has a beautiful big mole on her right cheek."	Fairness, big eyes, dark hair, and black beauty spot define beauty.
5	"She was stunningly beautiful with a black mole on her right cheek."	She is beautiful because she is fair and has black beauty spots- fairness and beauty spots are the definition of Beauty
6	"They fed her, gave her milk to drink."	Men are the breadwinners of the family
7	"One of them even took off his jacket and gave it to her because she felt awkward without her dupatta, making repeated but futile attempts to cover her chest with her arms".	Women should cover their bodies. It is the accepted custom to wear the Dupatta, showing the imposed rules of patriarchy over women's bodies. Giving a jacket shows only men can protect her.

Conclusion

Manto's *"Khol Do"* is a story about the plight of people during the partition and emphasizes the atrocities women faced during this period. The story is narrated from the point of view of Sakina's father. Sakina, however, is silent in the story. The narrator is a male, and the story revolves around his viewpoints. Manto as a writer, brings out the patriarchal idea through his writing and indirectly manifests women as the 'inferior other'. His point of view and the way he uses language assert the hidden patriarchal ideology to impose power over women.

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Female Autonomy and Private Realm: Reading Harold Pinter's *The Room* in the Light of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*

Preksha Sharma
Research Scholar, Department of English
Banaras Hindu University
Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh) India
prekshasharma199@gmail.com

Prof. Maya Shanker Pandey
Professor, Department of English
Banaras Hindu University
Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh) India
mayabhu@gmail.com

Abstract

In this paper, I intend to analyze the image of the room which became a strong theme in Pinter and Woolf's works, and developed into a symbol of the private regions of the human mind and the secret chamber of the psyche that they set out to explore. Virginia Woolf, an important feminist figure, suggested the idea of the feminist perspective, gender inequality and homosexuality, in A Room of One's Own *(1929). Her 'Room' not only indicates the political, cultural, and educational space of women but also intrudes into the spheres of men. Woolf proposed women as a separate class altogether and shows how they are summed up as a contrast between the idealization of women in fiction written by men and how they are treated in real life. Similarly, Pinter's mouthpiece Mr. Kidd in* The Room (1957) *also classifies women into two persistent categories: the respectable one on the one side and disgraceful on the other as the mother, wife, and the whore. This accounts for them to use 'the room' as a metaphor because the room offers here security as well as resistance. This paper will also critically analyze how under pressure women operationalize the strict masculine moral principles in the patriarchal system.*
Keywords: Feminism, Gender Inequality, Patriarchy, Archetype, Discourse

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Prior to the late 1970s, many social scientific theories of violence against women entered mainly on "wife beating," were grounded in psychology, and focused on the characteristics and behaviour of female survivors instead of male offenders (DeKeserdy 621). For women, autonomy means freedom, independence, self-sufficiency, or individualism. Autonomy as women right's implies that "the individual has her own sense of self, enjoys moral and ethical equality with others and has the right to participate in moral and ethical decisions regarding not only her own private life but also the life of the community" (Howard-Hassmann 433). This gender especially in females refers to their independence

from disciplines or discourses. Earlier, the autonomy of a woman was defined as their rights which they won as suffrage in Britain, in 1928, the year when several drafts of Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* were written. She wished for 500 pounds a year and a room of her own. Not only Virginia Woolf but Pinter also in most of his plays have longed for a room of one's own. But why is there a need for a room emerges? And, how is it affecting the life of a woman? This paper will then focus on the consciousness of the women toward 'a room of one's own.' In the essay, Woolf's "room was a wish for freedom of mind, independence of property and body from fathers and husbands, professors and judges, all men of power and wealth who tell women what to do" (Alexander 275). She has given prominence to money, including a private realm which is necessary for a woman's autonomy. According to her, ". . . it is necessary to have five hundred a year and a room with a lock on the door if you are to write fiction or poetry" (Woolf 114), which Robinson and Liang while analysing in 2017 defined money as ". . . stands for the power to contemplate and that lock on the door means the power to think for oneself" (80). While in Harold Pinter's play, *The Room,* first written and produced in 1957, and published in 1960 'room' is a metaphor to explore social injustice, patriarchy, and suppression.

Virginia Woolf, a first-wave feminist critic, has written two famous, feminist non-fiction- *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas. A Room of One's Own* is a compilation of papers presented at the Art Society at Newnham and the Odataa at Girton in October 1928. Woolf's essay is a reaction to Arnold Bennett's *Our Women* in 1920, where he talked about the superiority of men over women (Bradshaw and Clarke xii). Woolf argued against this that male-dominated society had prevented women from having equal educational opportunities, economic independence, and private space to produce great art, across the centuries. She has opposed the patriarchal ideology and existing discourses and focused on the day-to-day problems faced by women and how it affects their minds. Woolf questioned in the essay, why even in the early 20th century, literary history has presented very few examples of great women writers from the past. She has expanded the debates on gender studies beyond constitutional rights (Robinson and Liang 14). Woolf's wish for a room is "a wish for an individual utopia" where she can withdraw herself from "human relationships" and provides a rare "self-centeredness for women" (Alexander 275).Feminism or the women's question was a key topic of debate in early 20th-century Britain. In *The Man-Made World, or Our Androcentric Culture* (1911), Charlotte Gilman also questioned the psychological effects of women's subjugation by men. Cicely Mary Hamilton in her *Marriage as a Trade* (2015) argued why there are no female writers equivalent to Shakespeare (Robinson and Liang 21). Woolf created a fictional character, Judith Shakespeare, sister of Shakespeare to illustrate how female voices are silenced or suppressed throughout history. Judith's suppression in the essay highlights the widespread nature of a male-dominated society, where they are unconsciously or unintendedly subjugating women. She has used the imaginary life of Judith to interrogate how and why history presents very few examples of female authors. The essay is a mixture of fiction, literary criticism, and historical analysis that talks about the issues of how society has silenced women. She also suggested in the fourth and fifth sections that even language use is gendered and there is no language for women. She calls it a man's sentence and raises a question on mental androgyny, she questions;

> Have you any notion of how many books are written about women in the course of one year? Have you any notion how many are written by men? Are you aware that you are, perhaps, the most discussed animal in the universe? (Bradshaw and Clarke 88)

A revisit of Pinter's *The Room* from Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* gives a fresh insight into Pinter's construction of his female character and a new 'gendered' phenomenological reading of his oeuvre. As an absurdist, Pinter in The Room discusses the existential issue of security and the importance of having a private space. He is known for using language as an adjective in his drama called, "Pinteresque." His plays are also known for the use of understatement, small sentences, long pauses, and silences and are characterized as "comedy of Menace" where characters are middle-class people struggling for their existence in a post-World War scenario. The play presents the effect of power as "the threat of expulsion, the association of power with sexuality, infantilisation, and blindness" (Cahn 23). How does power operate, construct, transform, and strengthen the effect or meaning? Where there is power, there is resistance, and this resistance comes from the bottom and characterizes the relationship between sex, power, and knowledge.

Room as a Metaphor or the Private Realm

The word 'room' is defined in Oxford English Dictionary (OED), as 'space in general', 'accommodation', and 'domains, dominions, territories'. Virginia Woolf's phrase 'a room of one's own' also appears in OED, attributed to her, and defined as 'a room or place to oneself, as a symbol of independence, privacy, autonomy,' etc. "The 'room' that Woolf mentions repeatedly in the essay which represents both a physical separation from men's domains as well as the metaphysical space that merges with the Lacanian 'Real' is the means of escaping a patriarchal stranglehold on women's ability to shape society" (Sheikh 20). This shows how power and domination have metaphorically locked them in a certain space, i.e., home, and locked out of others, which are male-centric institutions.

'The room' is a strong theme in most of the plays by Pinter signifying a secure and cozy but limited known world of his characters. In his first play, *The Room,* the protagonist was alarmed by the unknown dark universe, which was symbolized by the basement and the world outside her room. "The room becomes an image of the small area of light and warmth that our consciousness, the fact that we exist, opens up in the vast ocean of nothingness from which we gradually emerge after birth and into which we sink again when we die" (Gordon 41). The symbol of the room is noted as a central poetic image in the works of Pinter as; 'a room in a large house'-*The Room*, 'the living room of a house in a seaside town'—*The Birthday Party*, 'a basement room'—*The Dumb Waiter*, and 'a room'—*The Caretaker,* he has not only shown the struggle of women but also of men. "The image of the room has been working symbolically –it has come to stand for a profoundly experienced notion of warmth, friendliness, and security that can only be perceived on "the frontiers of consciousness"" (Bernhard 187). For Rose, the room is a warm and comfortable place, when Rose gets to know that her room is empty and available for rent, she gets panicked:

Mrs. Sands: The man in the basement said that there was one. One room. Number

seven he said.
Pause.
Rose: That's this room. (Pinter 102)

The information from Mrs. Sands gave a real shock to Rose and was equivalent to her death sentence for her. Rose furiously denies that her room is not going to be vacant. The room has a dual image of refuge/ prison because the room not only secures but also resists. For her, the room is a superior figure and she called the damp and obscure basement inferior. In the play, there is a frequent recurring image of a room or a room with a door, and outside the door is a cold and hostile world. The door has become a focal point of suspense and tense expectation. His characters always isolate themselves and live in a womb-like structure, to hide their ordinariness, ineptness, and sheer emptiness. The play portrays a continuous power struggle of Rose like other characters of Virginia Woolf in her essay, to address and examine how social and material conditions affect women's psyche. Like Woolf, Pinter also describes the outside world as 'murderous', but for Woolf, not just the outside is unpleasant but the inside as well. She defines this as:

> I thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out, and; I thought how it is worse perhaps to be locked in, and thinking of the safety and prosperity of one sex and the poverty and insecurity of the other and of the effect of the tradition and lack of tradition upon the mind of a writer. (Bradshaw and Clarke 88)

Concept of 'Other'

"Other reflects women's position as an object in society, a silent mirror reflecting only men's(the subject's) image" (Ali 113). The concept of 'other' was first introduced in philosophy by J.S. Mill as 'other mind' in 1865, and phenomenologists like Hegel, Husserl and Sartre applied it in terms of 'intersubjectivity.' Psychologist associated with the 'radical counterpart of self'. Cheshire Calhoun, a feminist philosopher, identifies this 'other' as the 'female half of the binary gender relation.' According to feminist critics, 'women are the other half of men.' Feminist critic and philosopher of existentialism, Simone de Beauvoir, has also given prominence to the concept of 'the other.' She has tried to prove that this 'otherness' is not natural but cultural, as gender and sex, as defined by Foucault and Judith Butler. Beauvoir has discussed this as: 'one is not born but becomes a woman', which means that their identity is constructed. She has quoted Aristotle as to how women are women as they lack certain qualities. This 'other' specify subjectivity concerning; "women have ovaries, a uterus; these peculiarities imprison her in her subjectivity . . . Man superbly ignores the fact that his anatomy also includes glands, which secret hormones" (ed. McCann, 33). They discussed how women are different in this men-dominated society and are stereotyped.

Sakellaridou, an eminent critic of Pinter, uses Beauvoir's remarks, that this archetypal perception of humanity is the product of the masculine mind and has evolved into a "unilateral form of sexual myth" (21). Victor L. Cohn presents a critical analysis of the construction of gender and sex in the plays of Pinter. He asserts the duality of women as they are not only aware of their nature but of the nature of men which gives them power and the capacity for survival. His characters are the products of a recognizable world of social forces

and class values, who have been either crushed by the weight of the social world or others who resist being crushed. "Pinter paints a terrifying picture of individual pressure by the force of the society wherein a woman loses her individuality and becomes a drugged member of that social machine" (Dukore 51). Most of his plays even lack female characters, as in *The Dumb Waiter* (1957), *The Caretaker* (1959), *The Dwarfs* (1960), *Monologue* (1972), *No Man's World* (1974), *Victoria Station* (1982), and *The New World Order* (1991). His plays focus mainly on male authoritarianism and provide only mute or submissive forms of resistance. "The structure of Pinter's plays excluded a political understanding of women's agency; the status of women as objects of abuse, fear, and desire is not simply objective. This is all the more significant where the misogynist structure of representation becomes a generalized metaphor for the abuse of power" (Milne 240). Pinter has an interest in marginality as he makes no borderline between reality, memory, and fantasy. There is another example of 'us and 'other' in the play, the black character Riley who was always 'others' and considered inferior, is a symbol of darkness, terror, and death, and when Bert comes back from outside and sees him sitting in a chair he becomes violent and stereotype him as an insect, 'lice' and beat him until he lay motionless to maintain his supremacy in his room. Virginia Woolf has also investigated the subjectivity of women and questioned the suppression of women by several agents not directly but indirectly referring to men and patriarchy. But she was criticized by Alice Walker, in her essay, "In Search of our Mothers Gardens" for the non-representation of these "others" as black women, who argues that as a black they do not even own themselves then how can they own money (500 pounds) and a room for themselves?

Effect of Patriarchy

The definition of patriarchy is much debated in sociology and feminism. Ozaki & Otis, contemporary feminist scholars identified a variety of patriarchy. Structurally, the patriarchy is "a hierarchical social organisation of social institutions and social relationships that allows men to maintain power, privilege, and leadership in the society" (DeKersdey 623). According to radical feminist Shulamith Firestone, patriarchy is a system of oppression. bell hooks, a cultural critic, also in her work *The Will to change,* explains patriarchy as "a political- social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence" (18). Brukner also in 2019, defined this discrimination as "women are discriminated against based on their sex, as they are denied access to the same political, financial, career, and personal opportunities as men" (cited in DeKeserdy 623). Woolf in her essays has highlighted this discrimination as "Wife-beating" as "a recognized right of man and was practiced without shame by high as well as low" also "the daughter who refused to marry the gentleman of her parents' choice was liable to be locked up, beaten and flung about the room, without any shock being inflicted on public opinion" (Robison and Liang 32). She is talking about inequality and violence, which were considered right in society, which was a matter of shame. Pinter's plays are also the best example of this, where

his female characters are either wives, mothers, or whores. As, Rita Felski discussed, "male authors were only creating madonnas or whores, the extreme categories available to women in a patriarchal society" (51). In his first play, *The Room*, the protagonist Rose is a married woman who is dependent on her husband and a devoted wife who is struggling to maintain her relationship. Not only is Rose, but Pinter's other female characters such as Meg in *The Birthday Party, Emma in Betrayal* and Ruth from *The Homecoming,* are presented in the same manner as Rose. The prominent images in his plays are domestic violence, linguistic conflict, and territorial struggle. Here in the play, the territorial struggle of Rose was her struggle to keep the room which was depicted by her constant fear and urge for coziness and warmth in the room. "The haunting image of the room has been inextricably associated in the Pinter criticism with problems of identity and selfhood faced by all his major characters" (Sakellaridou 32). Terror persists throughout the play; Rose is afraid to lose her security as well as from an unknown intruder. "The sexual aspect of the female relationship remains marginal as Pinter focuses on the women's struggle to cast off the dominance of the male, deconstruct the female 'otherness', create a distinctly personal discourse and make claim to power" (34). His plays are an analysis of the abuse of power presented by images, games, silences, and pauses, etc. In this continuous power game, Rose loses power by the end after Bert's violence as she shut her eyes and shouts, "can't see. I can't see. I can't see" (Pinter 110), and then blackout. This not only indicates a shift of power but also the end of Rose's individuality as she lost all her vision. In the end, Pinter also expresses the shifting of authority from father to husband, who killed the intruder, a black named Riley, who represents the father's authority. So, to study violence against women, new empirical and theoretical work is necessary that not only " resurrects the patriarchy" but also avoids "simply espousing " oppositional rhetoric" about orthodox" (DeKeserdy 628).

Conclusion

Woolf and Pinter presented the picture of a woman beaten down by the social forces around her. It is the picture of a woman's identity without individuality. It is a picture of the powerlessness and the horrifying image of their struggle. Pinter distorted the idealized image of women, his characters are not just the archetypal image of a woman as a daughter, mother, and wife. Rose, the female protagonist of *The Room* tried to get away from the nature imposed on her and consequently voices her fear, anxiety, and desire but under strict pressure, she internalizes masculine moral principles. In Pinter's work, the struggle between autonomy and the private realm ends on a tragic note. As, In the end, Bert attacked the negro, he lay motionless and Bert walked away. The same is the case with Woolf's fictional character, Judith Shakespeare, whose struggle for subjectivity also ends with her death. But *A Room of One's Own* tried to make a path for intellectual freedom for women. This text is considered a classic or touchstone in the field of feminist theory by the feminist critic, Susan Gubar. Woolf unlike Pinter has not ended her work on a pessimistic note for women but her work gives a future direction. Pinter defends himself in a speech at the National Student Drama Festival in Bristol (1962): "a play is not an essay, nor should a playwright under any exhortation damage the consistency of his characters by injecting a remedy or apology for their actions into the last

act" (Pinter x). "*A Room* is enduringly valuable for its insistence that women's lives should not be confined to domestic realms, and that creative or professional pursuits, as well as independent lifestyles, are both possible and acceptable" (Robinson and Liang 69). However, the distinction persists between men, women and other minority groups. From the global perspective, the investigation of these aspects is still relevant as women are far more narrowly constrained than men. Since feminism is a struggle to end sexist oppression. Therefore, it is necessarily a struggle to eradicate the ideology of domination that permeates culture on various levels to reorganize society so the self-development of women can take precedence over social, political, cultural and economic equality (McCann 51).

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Pretty Woman into Gold Digger: Deconstructing the Sexual Politics

Lalthanzami
Research Scholar
Department of English
Chandigarh University
Gharuan, Mohali (Punjab) India
zamteivio@gmail.com

Dr. Smarika Pareek
Associate Professor
Department of English
Chandigarh University
Gharuan, Mohali (Punjab) India
smarika.uila@cumail.in

Abstract

A woman being trashed by words is not a novel thing. The past few decades have archived literature that tells the story of how some women met their fate of being the subject of gossip or ended up being cautionary tales. This paper outlines how women fell from being the admired 'pretty woman' to monstrous figures and perceived as a predator and labeled as 'gold diggers', or 'la belle dame sans merci' the study is done qualitatively through texts such as Gold Digger; The Outrageous Life and Times of Peggy Hopkins Joyce *by Constance Rosenblum (2000),* Gentlemen Prefer Blondes *by Anita Loos (1925),* "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" *by John Keats (1819). The paper unfolds the sexual politics of males and females in terms of materialism and beauty by employing the Theory of Deviance propounded by Howard Becker in his book The Outsider in 1963 and the concept of Naomi Wolf in The Beauty Myth in 1990, providing the arguments on the politics of both genders on how the mentioned labels are inscribed.*
Keywords: Gold-diggers, label, sexual politics, Theory of Deviance, Beauty Myth.

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Introduction

Scanning through multiple works of literature, one can find numerous women characters who were advancing their life and goals through the power of sexuality as well as number of men who represent masculinity and find a sense of accomplishment from rescuing a damsel in distress. As culture is dynamic, so do the norms and perspectives of society. Jeff Caroll in his article "Cinderella made Gold Diggers" pointed out the fact that fairy tales like *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *Beauty and the Beast* have all projected how appearances and wealth are coveted aspects in life. How Cinderella advances her lifestyle from the power of her looks, how the Prince in *Sleeping Beauty* fell in love with the sleeping Princess based

on her appearance despite being asleep and not uttering words to showcase her personality, and how Beauty agrees to go to the Beast's house knowing that he is nice and rich. The mentioned Fairy Tales have sent messages to young readers about the importance of beauty and grace. Several novels from the Victorian period often show how women were raised to be delicate and beautiful ladies to find a financially stable husbands while the novels of Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell, and George Eliot have depicted the fallen women in society. The line between being the perfect woman and the fallen woman is drawn by society on the ground of what a perfect woman should be. The term 'gold digger' has been used on men who venture out on gold expeditions during the Gold-Rush period but was started to be used as a concept on women in a negative context from the 1920s. The term was popularized by the play *Gold Digger* (1919) by Avery Hopwood in literature and pop culture. In the modern day, the term has been employed to label women who appear to have benefited from men through relationships. Several content on Social- Media was entitled 'Gold Digger Pranks' where women in the videos were portrayed as a predator hunting for money from men. *Gold Digger; The Outrageous Life and Times of Peggy Hopkins Joyce* by Constance Rosenblum 2000 is the biography of the Jazz age woman Marguerite Upton who was also known as Peggy Hopkins Joyce. The book recounted her life and journey towards her sexual liberation. She was labeled as a 'gold digger' by people of her time which was projected in the book title itself. Anita Loos' *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* centers on the life and agenda of Lorelai Lee, a young woman living off of wealthy men she encounters, especially Mr. Eisman who apparently is educating her. The ballad "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" by John Keats has narrated how the knight encounters a beautiful woman that made him lovesick and loitering in the desolate place. The works which are taken as a primary source in this paper have highlighted how women took control of sexual politics by making use of the power and traits that society laid out for the benefits and pleasure of masculine sex.

The Politics of Beauty and Masculinity

The three characters in the selected works namely Lorelai Lee from *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1925), Peggy Hopkins from *Gold Digger; The Outrageous Life and Times of Peggy Hopkins Joyce* (2000), and the fairy maiden in the poem of John Keats "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" (1819) were all described as exquisitely beautiful. Peggy was described as, "a smashingly beautiful child with flawless skin and enormous blue eyes" (Rosenblum 20). The book discusses how she realized the power she has, which is her looks, and how she uses it to get what she wants. She realized at a young age that being delicate and just being pretty can acquire the things she desires instead of working hard for them. Once she saw how good looks have privilege in a patriarchal society, she ultimately realized the power she has.

> "She learned early that smiling rather than bawling got her the candy suckers that she craved," George Tucker wrote, and classmates remembered her as bubbly and good-natured, an easy-going youngster who rarely took offense. "She had nice manners and people liked her," her father once told a reporter. "She would do anything in the world to please anybody, and she never cried unless she was sick (Rosenblum 20).
>
> In the novel *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes,* from the narrator Lorelai Lee's journal entry,

it can be speculated that she has possessed immense physical beauty and charm from the numerous suitors and their behaviors she mentioned. It can be observed that she got expensive gifts from men which they gave to her willingly to woo her and she enjoyed receiving them. Her behavior and perspective on materialism make her the epitome of what society and popular culture called 'gold digger'. Lorelai also wrote that Mr. Eisman is interested in educating her, thus she does educate herself according to what Mr. Eisman wants, to satisfy his pride and to feed his feeling of dominance over her. The acts also project how Lorelai embraces and employs the process to her own benefit by letting him control her to get what she wanted. Peggy Hopkins when she was Marguerite Upton, exercised her power of looks by being a delicately beautiful girl whom men wanted, according to the book *Gold Digger; The Outrageous Life and Times of Peggy Hopkins Joyce* (2000), Rosenblum depicts that Peggy's goal is to never have a dull and dreary life. In order to reach her goal, she employed the power of looks. "Lorelei uses performativity and her image as a desirable object to influence suitors to give her cultural signifiers which help her rise in class" (Aldrich 23). For Lorelai, her beauty is like a currency she used to get the material things she desires. The mentioned poem of John Keats "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" describes a lady in the poem as,

I met a lady in the meads,
Full beautiful, a faery's child
Her hair was long, her foot was light
And her eyes were wild. (Keats, lines 13-16)

Thus, from the three ladies mentioned in the selected works, it can be considered that beauty is a powerful tool to acquire something from masculine beings, and the point also unfolds the politics of both sexes. Lorelai Lee and Peggy Hopkins successfully exercise their domination over men in terms of getting material goods. It depicts the power of sexuality equipped with outer beauty. The transaction of affection and materials between men and women is shown in the selected texts and also projects how masculinity can be lured with delicacy and beauty which myriads of traditional tales have associated with femininity. When one observes Fairy Tales, the binary opposition of gender, male and female has been projected in the form of a knight in shining armor and a beautiful girl in distress like in the story of *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Rapunzel,* etc. The masculine traits of admiring and pursuing the shiny beauty of feminine essence can be decoded from these stories. In the children's story *Sleeping Beauty*, the beautiful girl was found sleeping in the woods, and when the prince saw her, he took her to be his wife, the girl who was sleeping doesn't show much attitude or personality. "The prince knows nothing about this sleeping woman; he only sees her physical appearance. However, that is all it takes for him to wed her and make her the mother of his children. Sleeping Beauty was first published by Charles Perrault in 1697" (Carroll 2012). This statement highlights the way fairy tales put emphasis on feminine traits laid out by society and beauty for women to possess, and it also depicts the hegemonic masculinity and ideology of patriarchal society. In the case of Lorelai Lee, "she realizes she can use society's sexist ideology and sentiment against it to persuade a man to buy the tiara for her through the agency of sex power and her 'dumb blonde' persona" (Aldrich 24). The movie version of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* was made in 1953 by Howard Hawks where the

character Lorelai Lee states to Mr. Eisman, "It's men like you who have made me the way I am" (Hawks 1:08:13) which evinces the politics Lorelai played and it also overshadows how she got her power from the traits which society suggests to be pursued by the masculine. She also declared in the movie version that she could be smart in vital matters but claimed that most men do not entertain women that way. It can be argued from the evidence pointed out in the selected texts that the politics of both sexes in terms of beauty and materialism is greatly influenced by the trope of femininity and masculinity with their associated essences attributed to them by society.

I made a garland for her head
And bracelets too, and fragrant zone
She looked at me as she did love
And made sweet moan (Keats, lines 17-20)

The Politics of Menace and Labelling

In the poem, "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" by John Keats, the Knight recounted to the poet persona about his encounter with a beautiful lady whom he called "a faery's child" (Keats line 14). He then said that he dreamt he saw kings, princes, and warriors who seemed to be a victim of the enchantment of the beautiful lady he saw.

I saw pale kings and princes too
Pale warriors, death pale were they all;
They cried 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci'
Thee hath in thrall! (Keats, lines 36-39)

The lines project the fairy maiden as a very powerful being as the men who told the Knight that they have been enthralled were powerful men like Kings, Warriors, and Princes, not the men with ordinary statuses. The poem states that no birds were singing, which can be the depiction of the barren landscape as well as the hint of menace as an important aspect of the poem. It highlights that the beautiful encounter the knight had was not only a love tale but also a cautionary tale about how beautiful women can break great men's hearts. It can be assumed that if the power of beauty and seduction the lady possesses is trivial, then the men whom the knights saw in his dream who warned him would be mentioned as ordinary men, furthermore, considering that menaces are only put forward for enormous and powerful things.

I saw their starved lips in the gloam
With horrid warning gape wide
And I awoke and found me here,
On the cold hill's side. (Keats, lines 40-43)

Since 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' means a beautiful lady without mercy, the poem can be appropriated as a depiction of a cautionary tale, and the politics of menace and labeling can be observed. When Peggy Hopkins Joyce got into her first marriage, Rosenblum wrote that it was an extremely bitter experience for her that she did not even put an entry in her diary. In the book *Gold Digger; The Outrageous Life and Times of Peggy Hopkins Joyce*, it can be seen that Peggy became bolder in her way of living and liberating herself sexually without giving considering the opinions and morals of people in her time after her bitter experience of

marriage.

> Within seventy-two hours, the romance was over, or so she claimed, "Oh God God God why wasn't I told marriage was like this? She moaned. "My heart is broken, I am bruised and sick and I hope I shall die soon so I shall never have to remember those three terrible days." (Rosenblum 28)

She then pursued her goal of living in the certain way she wanted, she freed herself from the moral bindings in her time as she remarried and got divorced several times. She was labeled as a 'gold digger' when she became her full boldest self. "She admitted years later in her memoirs that she knew her beauty could be an asset and was determined to use it, however shamelessly, to achieve her goals" (Rosenblum 21). Lorelai Lee in the movie, *Gentlemen Prefer Blonde* was stalked by a private detective hired by Mr. Esmond. Mr. Esmond was afraid that his son Mr. Eisman would marry Lorelai as he thought that Lorelai was a 'gold digger' who only wanted to marry his son for money. He made his private detective stalk her to catch her misbehaving. That amount of cautiousness and actions can be decoded as a point that hints at the power of Lorelai and her politics as well. According to Howard Becker, a deviant is the one to whom the label has been successfully applied. In this case, the label of 'gold digger'. It can be observed from the negative trope the stereotype holds, that the people labelled under the stereotype are considered a deviant. Deviance is created by society according to the criteria it constructed, and whoever meets the criteria or breaks the rules, were called deviants or given a label, "Whether an act is deviant, then, depends on how other people react to it" (Becker 11). When Peggy was Marguerite Upton, a nice delicate beautiful girl, people had no problems showering her with the things she wanted. Lorelai Lee was also given numerous gifts by Mr. Eisman when he controlled her behavior. But as she exercised the power of her sexuality to manipulate men to get what she wanted, she was called a 'gold digger' even by the novel's own author Anita Loos. "In 1953, Loos commented on her heroine's popularity: "Lorelei, the immoral gold digger, [became] the sweetheart of the world" (Blom 40). When the fairy lady in the poem of Keats was nice and enchanting, the Knights gave her gifts. Thus, a fairy lady was labelled as 'la belle dame sans merci' because it is a popular belief and expectation that a beautiful woman will also have a beautiful attitude. Peggy and Lorelai were labelled as 'gold diggers' because of the certain belief that a woman should be submissive and receive supports from men naturally by not going after the support or 'digging it'. Thus, the labelling theory of Howard Becker stands in deconstructing the politics of 'gold digger' labelling in that case.

From the selected texts, it can be argued that the three women were labeled as 'gold diggers' or 'a lady without mercy' as a caution, with a menace encoded in the statements given to describe them when their power in their politics become strong and considered deviant according to society. Naomi Wolf in her book The Beauty Myth propounded that when the material constraints on women become loose, the beauty standard rises to drag women down and create a rivalry between women. "Beauty is a currency system like the gold standard. Like any economy, it is determined by politics, and in the modern age in the West, it is the last, best belief system that keeps male dominance intact" (Wolf 20). This statement can be applied in this argument that men encourage beauty standards to exercise their power and masculine traits of hunting down pleasure and aesthetics desire, moreover, they have no issue with

pursuing beautiful women by showering them with lavishing materials as long as women were under their dominance and stick to a subversive feminine essence. When a female who embodies the power to backfire the masculine control and discards as many husbands as Peggy Hopkins or takes anything she wants through her sexuality from men as Lorelai Lee, or when a woman is seductive enough to enchant Knights, Kings, and Princes to death or loitering alone in desolation, the act of labeling was constructed as a form of menace negatively. Thus, one can also find a song called "Gold Digger" by EPMD which was released in 1990 sending a warning through its lyrics that states, "Beware of the jackhammer and the helmet that glows, Cause she's a gold digger" (EPMD 2:34-36). The lyrics of the song also depict how the songwriter's main motive the song was to put a menace in the song, to create awareness, and talked about its character as a cautionary tale that shows the male persona as a victim of the female character it mentioned.

Conclusion

The selected texts have shown the three women characters who could fall into the category of what society calls 'gold digger' or 'la belle dame sans merci'. The paper highlights the correlation between beauty and the concept of a 'gold digger'. The fact that beauty and charm were used politically to advance the character's agenda in the selected works by the mentioned characters is evidence of how men exercise their dominance over women by controlling them with the power of money and materials which was often associated with masculinity as they have no issue in pursuing them in terms of providing help or material things as long as they acted vulnerable, pretty, and subversive. "Loos insisted that Lorelei's irresistible charm is both product and charm of sexual inadequacy and hypocrisy in American men in general" (Blom 1976). And when the female exercised their power of beauty and charm to pursue their agenda successfully to the point of rising above male-dominated constraints or morality, they were labeled as 'la belle dame sans merci' or in the case of this paper as 'gold diggers' because of the societal rules which dictate the female to be feminine which is often associated with subversiveness, beauty, and kindness. When female characters become powerful to have men in despair or liberate themselves sexually by living by their own rules, they set themselves on the periphery as they move away from what society dictates good women to be, thus they were labeled in the mentioned terms in the form of othering them as a powerful villain or something to be warned of.

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Depiction of Sexual Politics in Smita Bharti's Play
Ghat Ghat Mein Panchi Bolta Hai

Dr Sandhya Tiwari
Assistant Professor
Palamuru University
Mahabubnagar (Telangana) India
drstpu@gmail.com

Abstract

Drama is a special literary field that has the unique and effective means that can transform abstract human feelings and imagination into concrete action. It has an explicit structure that has the powerful potential to be able to be performed on the stage. Thus, through the medium art pours life into thoughts, feelings, emotions and actions that are written on a page. When it comes to the contribution and position of Indian women playwrights, they have achieved remarkable success in the recent past. Indian women playwrights addressed the long suppressed, the under-represented issues through gendered lenses. By expressing their own experiences in their own language or in English, they provide expression to many social and political disputes in this so-called modern country (Deshmukh & Mane14). Women writers largely expressed their resentment against the politics of exploitation on the basis of gender description; hence it can be attributed as the 'Theatre of Protest'. This article captures the revelation of sexual politics through the lens of Gynocriticism in Smita Bharti's English play with Hindi title Ghat Ghat Mein Panchi Bolta Hai
Keywords: Sexual Politics, Gynocritical Concerns, Indian Women Playwrights, Contemporary Indian Drama, Smita Bharti, Ghat Ghat Mein Panchi Bolta Hai, Child Abuse

Indian English literature has advanced over a period of time. Plays as a literary genre are unique and effective means that can transform abstract human feelings and imagination into concrete action. Indian women playwrights have given a new dimension to the Indian Writing in English. Women playwrights have expressed their resentment against the politics of exploitation on the basis of gender description; hence it can be attributed as the 'Theatre of Protest'.

The study of the Indian women's theatre and their writings is a growing genre in Indian writing in English. The theatre tradition in India goes back to the first century and has been steadily developing, where modern dramatists have incorporated the old traditional methods and varieties to make the modern drama more enriching and vitalized and ethnic. Psychoanalysis of these women characters can be done. The plays by Indian women playwrights deal with issues that exist in the society. These plays capture the bleak and dreary realities in the life of Indian women – whether educated, urban or uneducated, rural - with stunning frankness. These playwrights give us a picture of the unexplored female psyche. Smita Bharti is one such playwright who has portrayed the crimes perpetuated against women in the name of tradition and culture in a male-dominated society. She uses the stage as a

powerful tool for social critique and reform.

Gender, culture and identity are interconnected and are the variables that play an important part in the lives of women. Indian Feminist Theatre or the Indian Women's Theatre is women-centric and community-centric. It has a long history and it stands out as a gateway of resistance and activism. The women writers have all carved a niche for themselves by creating their own standards that are quite unique. These innovative and pioneering women playwrights do not follow the regular pattern of exposition-conflict-resolution. These plays are more fluid, fluctuating between the past and the present or between the real experiences of more than one protagonist. The use mythology, local traditional music, dialogues and songs is employed to add to their thematic credibility.

Anita Singh in her essay "Aesthetics of Indian Feminist Theatre" categorically formalises the characteristics of the emerging women's theatre and plays. The form of the experimental theatre and the agenda of the women movement shaped the content of plays. It sought a definition and found several and we can name a few here. The production and script characterized by consciousness of women as women; dramaturgy in which art is inseparable from the condition of women as women; performances (written and acted) that deconstruct sexual differences and thus undermine patriarchal power; and finally, scripting and production that present transformation as a structural and ideological replacement for recognition and creation of women characters in the subject position, (Aesthetics of Indian Feminist Theatre, 153) — are unique aspects that can be found even now in the contemporary plays written by women writers like Smita Bharti.

Smita Bharti often focuses on the female psyche. Anita Singh in her chapter "Re-Drawing Boundaries of the Canon: Indian English Women Dramatists" in the book, *Contemporary Indian English Poetry and Drama*graphically explains the rise of the Indian Feminist Theatre and the emergence of Indian Women Playwrights. She quotes Michelene Wandor who finds that women have been more in evidence as playwrights at moments of social and cultural change, and it is very true in India. Women in India have risen to the occasion to prove it and have opened the way for far-reaching challenges and experiments. These playwrights gave the audience and the reader a chance to re-assess the patriarchal ideology and culture in order to articulate and define gender relations (1-10).

Smita Bharti is the executive director/president of "Sakshi", a rights-based NGO and the programme director of The Rakshin Project by "Sakshi", a youth-led movement across 40,000 colleges Pan-India to prevent, prohibit and resolve child sexual abuse. In her online article, "Smita Bharti: In Search of the Seed", in *The Punch Magazine*, she makes the following statement about herself:

> I realised I slipped because I had not learnt to build the bridge with my six-year-old self who was sexually abused. . . . That this does not make her a bad girl.

A learned woman, who knew the heartache and pain of suffering due to child abuse and domestic violence, Smita is a prolific writer, social activist and playwright, with a passion to help the youth and the girl child. Her personal experiences her voracious reading, her capacity to listen to others, makes her an excellent playwright, she says:

> Theatre gave me my questions, which got me honest answers and helped me correlate what I had heard and read with what I had lived and seen. . . . My vulnerable sharing

created a safe space for them to find themselves.

Her passion to help others brought a positive response and helped people find their identities and grow. There was no place left unexplored by Smita in her deep desire to help women and girls in distress or help them protect themselves from the predators. She asked questions and sought out answers for them. These experiences and thoughts and her desire to help other women and girls and the youth gave her the power to write and share her knowledge and experience through more than twenty plays in which she has acted and directed also. Ameeta Kalokhe, et.al. in their exhaustive article, "Domestic Violence Against Women in India: A Systematic Review of a Decade of Quantitative Studies", make the following statement: "Among the different proposed causes for the high DV frequency in India are deep-rooted male patriarchal roles (Visaria1742–1751) and long-standing cultural norms that propagate the view of women as subordinates throughout their lifespan".

Gender roles are also important and many playwrights have touched upon this issue in their plays. According to Robert J Stoller, "gender is a term that has psychological or cultural rather than biological connotations" (Stoller 1457). Right from infancy, boys and girls are taught gender specific behaviour. Girls are taught to be obedient, submissive, tolerant and generous. Whereas boys are taught to be aggressive, dominating, adventurous and outspoken, says Archana Verma Singh in her journal article, "The Influence of Patriarchy on Gender Roles"

> Gynocriticism is born out of the second feminist wave's acknowledgement of sexual differences and the uniqueness of women's writing" says Poulomi Chandra in her online article, "Gynocriticism: A Female Framework for the Analysis of Women's Literature". (28)

Gynocriticism centres mainly on a female-centric analysis of women's literature, concentrating mainly on identity, subjectivity, experience, and female language.

Elaine Showalter in her essay, "Towards a Feminist Poetics" presents the idea of her theory which refers to a criticism that constructs "a female framework for the analysis of women's literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt male models and theories". Her essay studies the female struggle for identity and the social construct of gender. It is the study of not only the female as a gender but also the 'internalized consciousness' of the female (Khurana141).

Smita Bharti's play revolves around the character Sanjay, and the women he comes into contact with. The society in which these women live prevent them from unburdening the hidden secrets of life and these women, each one of them finally decide to unburden these secrets in letters and also through social media platforms like *Instagram*, which are not only shameful, but also secrets that have not allowed them to live a fulfilling life or shape their identities and they are all trapped in a patriarchal society. This society gives the men the upper hand and keeps all the women, educated and well placed in life to sacrifice their true happiness and lead an artificial life of 'picture perfect happiness' that is projected to the society and world at large.

The play unfolds the life of two close friends, Chitra and Nikita. The play spans the life of three generations. Most of them are a flashback, except for the last scene where Sanjana who is Sanjay and Nikita's daughter, speaks to the photo of her dad who is now dead and comes

out with the absolute truth that has already been shared by Taramma, her maternal grandmother. There are eight women characters in this play, who speak out their love and the hidden secrets that they kept in their hearts for more than two decades.

Sona is Chitra's sister. Their mother is Prabha, who has a very small part in the play. Sona has loved Kumud all long her life and is disappointed and devastated when Kumud marries Jaggi. Sona expresses her love for her and says that it would shock her mother, Prabha who was waiting for a nice man to come and marry her daughter, Sona. She feels that Kumud is trapped in her marriage that is 'perfect' in the eyes of the world, but Kumud is the sister of Sanjay and the sister-in-law of Nikita. Kumud and Sanjay lost their parents on a rainy day when she was five years old. She is brought up by Nikita's mother, Taramma, after Sanjay marries Nikita. Kumud is rebellious and angry that she has been separated from her loving brother, Sanjay, who had taken care of her so lovingly after their parent's death. She doesn't want to be separated from her brother. Taramma takes good care of her, but she doesn't love her much, though she often mentions that the shawl that Taramma gave her comforts her now also when she keeps going back to her old memories and young life. She describes her family as perfect when she says:

> I have the most amazing normal life that anyone could dream of. A perfect traditional husband, two very beautiful and straight children, and a perfectly mother-in-law type of mother-in-law who does not miss a single opportunity to make me feel small. I have a perfectly normal life Tar Amma (Bharti 9)

Kumud confesses that she loved Sona more than anyone else could love a person. She was so happy when she was with her. She describes her love for her in very intimate terms, when she says that she had never been happier than when I was lying with you in your arms, wrapped in moonlight, bathed in laughter. (Smita 9) But she marries Jaggi because she doesn't want Taramma to point a finger at her and she says that she:

> . . . had to sacrifice the love of my life to get this perfectly normal life only so that you could not have the satisfaction of saying that I am in love with a woman, that I am in a relationship with Sona because my childhood was destroyed. (Bharti10)

Unfortunately, Kumud is no longer able to hide the bare truth of Taramma's sexual relationship with her own son-in-law when she talks about her love for Sona. Kumud's anger spills over when she speaks about Taramma and her illegal relationship with Sanjay, which is so perverted and a taboo in society. Taramma's relationship with Sanjay amounts to incest and is highly reprehensible and shameful.

> He was your very own son in law, he was my brother, your daughter's husband. What kind of a woman are you? Oh God, how will I ever address this venom that I have inside me for you. I hate you so much. You ruined so many lives. You selfish woman. You ruined my life (Bharti 9)

As the play unfolds, we can very obviously understand that Sanjay, as Chitra describes, the ever-loving man with: sweet timeless Sanjay, was still ensconced in his high back chintz covered armchair, in the sunlit corner of the room, his study desk still piled with books and notes, and now adorned with state-of-the-art iMac nestling with the age-old gramophone and stack of vinyl records, the needle scratching out the jazz numbers, as he pushed his silver glasses on to his head of silver, and with the same warm, welcoming, gentle

smile, hugged us both back into loving comfort (Bharti 15) is nothing but a smooth deceiver, who has not only preyed on his sister's body, but also on Taramma and later on Tanushree, Chitra's daughter. Sanjana, his own daughter, as a lawyer, finally gives the verdict on his nature and character.

Chitra is Nikita's very close friend. Her sister is Sona and her mother is Prabha. She likes Nikita very much and the two families are close. But they fall out when Nikita decides to marry Sanjay. We can understand that Chitra also loved Sanjay. Chitra brings her daughter often to Sanjay and Nikita's house and Sanjay often sits for her. Nikita accuses Chitra of coming to her house often, as she also loved Sanjay very much and had an affair with him. The plot thickens slowly. We can observe that all the action revolves around this man, Sanjay, who seems to be a mystery that is unravelled slowly and steadily by the playwright, which shocks the reader and the audience.

Chitra is a gynaecologist who has a thriving practice. She is married to Pradeep who is a different kind of predator. He is violent and abusive. The violence is so traumatic, but Chitra is used to it as she remarks:

> She will love him. Then he will hit her. Then he will control her. Then she will surrender, then she will scream. Then he will slowly squeeze the life out of her, and then she will go back for yet more and more of this. Abuse? Is it? When the prey seeks out the predator, and provokes him to prey on her? (Bharti 12)

He is a verbal, physical and financial abuser. Chitra earns in six figures, but hardly gets anything, he swallows all her income. Her mother, Prabha is surprised that her daughter continues to live with such a violent man. Her sister, Sona, despises her. Chitra has become so used to his harsh treatment, that she takes it for granted.

Chitra doesn't take any action to stop this horrible violence. She accepts it and goes on with life. She even says that she 'enjoys the violence' and she has made a deliberate choice and doesn't want anyone's sympathy or compassion. As a gynaecologist, it is Chitra who saves her daughter, Tarushree and Nikita's mother Taramma from shame and humiliation and indignity when they become pregnant because of their immoral relationship with Sanjay. These actions are all hidden in the name of honour and saving the families from disgrace. Tarushree is Chitra and Pradeep's daughter. Tanushre's confession brings out more sordid truths about Sanjay. Tarushree who is described as a millennial, takes to Instagram to talk about the truth and she wants her fans and readers to see it and she dedicates her message to Nikita:

> But Nikki Aunty I need you to know that this Insta live that I am doing is specially for you. I mean there are all these lovely viewers, my friends and fans who love my sutteri profile (Bharti 18).

As we have already noticed above, she is brought to Sanjay's house often. Tarushree says that Sanjay was a loving personality who was calm and reassuring, the exact opposite of her father. It is interesting to note that Sanjay is able to make her understand her father, Pradeep when she says:

> If anything, Sanjay always tried to make me see my father Pradeep's perspective, about where his anger probably came from. Sanjay always said my father is trapped in his own toxic masculinity (Bharti 19).

Tarushree falls for Sanjay, hook, line and sinker. She likes his calm, behaviour. She

invites her own fall, when she traps him into a love affair and she becomes pregnant. Her mother, Chitra, who is a gynaecologist is able to set things right and hide the real facts and gets the baby aborted and hides this truth from her husband also. Nevertheless, Sanjay stops her from coming to his house anymore and cuts the relationship. Tarushree loves him deeply and even wants to marry him. Now that Tarushree is nineteen, she is even more mature for her age and she makes her own decisions. She has already informed her mother that she loves Sanajana and wishes to live with her. She is now informing Sanjana'a mother, Nikita, through her Instagram page. Relationships that were once tabooed are now spoken openly. She is bold to record her love for Sanjana in social media, and informs Nikita because both the mothers are against such a relationship and she comments about it:

> She is okay with her minor child getting pregnant and getting her aborted. But she is not okay with two women loving each other and wanting to live together. (Bharti 19)

Tarushree loves Sanjana. They are, in fact lesbians. They have decided to live together, as society is now willing to accept such relationships. It is obvious that these very young women have by now in this modern age created their own identity, and are not afraid to declare their relationship which is strange and peculiar and definitely against the norms of society. By mentioning such a relationship on Instagram, Tarushree is making a bold leap in society and to also challenge the patriarchal norms of the society. These are two young women who are embracing a whole new identity. The lesbian's sexuality is different from heterosexuality. The playwright may be re-defining the identity of these pairs - Tarushree and Sanjana as 'new women'.

Lesbianism existed in ancient times in India. During ancient times, lesbianism was considered as an evil practice and a crime that was punished with fine or social ignominy. Books like *Arthashastra* and *Manusmriti* prove that the practice of lesbianism is very old in disrepute and ignoble form. Kamala Das' autobiography, *My Story*, published in 1976 was a bold attempt by her to bring out this tabooed subject to the limelight. In most of her novels, Shobha De seems to prefer lesbianism to heterosexuality. This may also be considered as a revolt against the prevailing norms and patriarchy which subordinates a woman to a man. These authors are trying to secure a distinctive identity and place for women without becoming a tool at the man's hand. Lesbianism establishes female autonomy over male dominated value-structure, says Dipak Giri in his journal article, "An Approach and Practice to Writing English Novels on Lesbianism: A Study of Post-modern Indian women Novelists from Late Twentieth to Present Century" (53).

We can firmly observe that Sanjana and Tarushree are not only defining their identity, but also creating a new identity by deviating from the so-called sacred norms of the patriarchal society. Tarushree goes miles ahead by declaring her decision in the social media. Smita Bharti is unquestionably recording the fact that the modern women have taken a new turn and are able to make radical decisions in their life. By placing these two young women in her play she is showing the society that women are now taking charge of their lives and want to be independent.

Nikita is Taramma's daughter. She is a gentle and petite girl. She marries Sanjay, the dream prince. She is fully aware that her friend, Chitra also loves him when she says:

> He was my Prince Charming. Loving, tender,erotic, poetic,

And you were so jealous of me.
All through our college life. (Bharti 21)

They have a daughter, Sanjana. Sanjay and Nikita have no children in the beginning, but Nikita insists on having a child, even though Sanjay gives lame excuses and cites her career as very important and not to be spoiled. But she persists in her desire and she finally gives birth to a beautiful baby girl, Sanjana. Nikita is surprised that Sanjay never touches the baby and though he gets leave to look after the baby, he ends up writing a novel.

It is Taramma who comes and takes the baby away to her house. Sanjana grows up in her maternal grandmother's house and Sanjay visits Taramma often. It is at this juncture that Taramma and Sanjay fall into an illicit relationship. Nikita is not aware of this, though Kumud knew it very well and was quite angry and ashamed of it. She hated Taramma for it. Nikita was never able to find out the real truth about Sanjay, as he was a smooth villain. He knew very well how to hide his real, disgusting character from many people.

Smita Bharti seems to affirm or approve of lesbianism like Alice Walker and many other Indian women novelists. We see two pairs of lesbians in this play; Sona and Kumud and Sanjana and Tarushree. Sanjana comes to know the exact truth about her father. The playwright, Smita Bharti, specifically writes her words in caps when she talks about her dad:

I Never Really Knew You Dad Did I? I Mean, It Seems You Were Just This Beautiful Story That I Heard From All Around Me. I Had Never Really Lived With You, Had I? You Sent Me Away. (Bharti 25)

Sanjana, as an intelligent lawyer, takes a firmer standpoint against her father who had deceived so many women. She doesn't want to sweep the dirt under the carpet. She wants the world around her to know that her father was a paedophile and a man who should be punished. She doubts his courage and feels that her father has betrayed her. She also feels that he should be punished. According to Indian law, the punishment for such an act is severe. Starting from a minimum of seven years, it can be even life imprisonment, says the online website, *Lexlife India: The legal Way of Life*, in the article, "Law Regarding Consensual Intercourse with Minors in India".

Conclusion

The plays by Indian women playwrights deal with issues that exist in the society and depict the world of the Indian women of all sections—educated/uneducated, urban/rural etc.—with stunning frankness. These playwrights give us a picture of the unexplored female psyche. Smita Bharti, through her plays, has portrayed the crimes perpetrated against women in the name of tradition and culture in a male-dominated society. She uses the stage as a powerful tool for social critique and reform. As women are denied of their semantic space, the very act of writing creates the possibility for a critique of language as well as patriarchal discourse. It is through writing that women can locate their position and identity. This brings out to another facet of writing in general as to if writing is linguistically or semantically or unknowingly gendered. The feminist ideology can be seen in the Indian women's theatre and the plays written by famous women writers who have also turned into directors of plays and actors.

Thus, in *Ghat Ghat Mein Panchi Bolta Hai*, Smita Bharti brings out all the truth part by part as each woman character speaks out her mind in an authentic tone and unburdens while portraying her own story. The play reveals how much women in the Indian family had to carry in their hearts when one man commits sin after sin and lives a carefree life, presenting himself to the society as a gentleman, while hiding such vile behaviour. Ever since Taramma had brought Kumud into her house, she knew that Sanjay was a paedophile.

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Patriarchal High-Handedness and Gender Bigotry: A Barbed Wire For a Sustainable Future

Inderjot Kaur
Research Scholar
Department of English
Chandigarh University
Gharuan, Mohali (Punjab) India
kahlon_inderjot@yahoo.com

Dr. Tanu Gupta
Professor
Department of English
Chandigarh University
Gharuan, Mohali (Punjab) India
tanu.e9349@cumail.in

Abstract

Various empowerment initiatives have benefited women in the 21st century, but ensuring sustainability remains a challenge. Even today, certain women in society are treated as second-class citizens, despite the fact that law enforcement authorities provide them with legitimate equality. Technological advancement and the removal of illiteracy have certainly raised the status of women but their proportion continues to hang over near the earlier sufferers' ratio. Despite the legal protection, domesticated and gender-based violence is still in vogue and women are the main target. Due to increasing pressure to adhere to society's demands, women are finding it difficult to break free from the patriarchy's grip. This research work aims to investigate the role of women in society presently and over the last few decades through the study of Bapsi Sidhwa's The Pakistani Bride*, Emma Donoghue's* Room*, and Meena Kandasamy's* When I Hit You Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*. By taking a few shreds of evidence from these novels, the study will shed light on women's amaranthine misery, patriarchal malevolence, and gender biasness along with emphasizing the need for eradicating gender disparity for a sustainable future, women empowerment, and to achieve sustainable development goals.*
Keywords: Gender Bigotry, Violence, Sustainable Development, Domination, Women, Patriarchy

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A tranquil, prosperous, and tenable world requires gender egalitarianism not just as a human right but as a prerequisite. Though the world has become modernized, digitalized, and capitalized from various perspectives, patriarchal high-handedness and gender bigotry are still persisting in many societies and the position of women remains distressing. It's just that the means and modes of pain and dominance against women have evolved over time. Women have had to struggle with a variety of traditions, a patriarchal culture, gender inconsistency, and indigenous practices for a long time. Due to the patriarchal nature of most societies,

women are discriminated against and dominated by their male counterparts in almost every field. Women's situation remains precarious even as the world strides toward modernization. Women empowerment has garnered considerable attention in the twenty-first century, signaling that there is a pressing need to eliminate gender imbalance for a sustainable future, which is also one of the Sustainable Development Goals ("Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda").

The present paper seeks to illustrate the continual violation of women and gender inequalities at present and in the past few decades through Bapsi Sidhwa's novel "*The Pakistani Bride*," Emma Donoghue's "*Room*," and Meena Kandasamy's "*When I Hit You Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*" so as to emphasize the critical necessity for gender equality to achieve sustainable development. In a nutshell, the current study attempts to explore gender inconsistency and the amaranthine plight of women in these novels. The work will demonstrate how a rowdy conviction framework and conduct are reinforced, regardless of one's feelings, education, class, or position, as well as how man-driven culture oppresses women's character and growth which is one of the root causes and obstruction for sustainable development.

Literature Review

As outlined in the 2030 agenda, the SDGs i.e. Sustainable Development Goals ("Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda") for sustainable development, provides an opportunity for countries to fulfill pledges made in numerous prior declarations, resolutions, and international agreements on precluding the violence against women.

The SDG 5 agenda has two specific goals for the elimination of violence and destructive activities, as well as the empowerment of women and gender equality. The first aim, 5.2, is to eliminate all types of abuse and exploitation against women and girls in both the public and private spheres. Target 5.3, which is the second target, aims to abolish all malpractices. These include child marriages, forced marriages, early marriages, as well as female genital damage. These specific goals reflect a conviction that ending all types of violence and destructive conduct directed at women is critical to eliminating gender inequities and achieving women's empowerment for sustainable development (Garcia-Morenoa and Amina 396-97).

This study will deconstruct selected works by Emma Donoghue, Bapsi Sidhwa, and Meena Kandasamy. Emma Donoghue, an Irish-Canadian author, wrote the novel *Room* in 2010. Bapsi Sidhwa wrote the novel *The Pakistani Bride* in 1983. She is an author who is Pakistani-American. Meena Kandasamy who is an Indian published her novel *When I Hit You Or, a Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* in 2017. The essence of the goals of woman's emancipation in literature and society, as well as for sustainable development, is the woman imprisoned in the transition of customs and restrictions burdened with the gender role, patriarchal surveillance, and control. The works chosen for study exemplify the tribulations of a woman seeking to rise above oppression and servitude in order to strengthen her character and independence from gendered prejudiced cultures. A large number of research works related to these novels illustrate the reasons that lead to unending abuse and cruelty against women (Bakshi 39-46; Banupriya 86-88; Jain and Yeddu 1722-28; Koguilavardhini 502-11; Malhotra 75-76; Balakrishnan 44-49; Nirwana and Khaswa 101-09) but no research work addressing the crucial necessity for gender equality to achieve sustainable development is available. There is no full-length study or research paper that examines these works from this approach.

Discussion

There has been a shift in the role of women in the modern world. In today's society, women hold a prominent position in regard to development, but due to the deep-rooted patriarchal mentality in many societies, women are still oppressed, humiliated, tortured, abused, and are the subject of marital abuse and gender bigotry (Sonowal and Moran 67-70). Women cannot have independent associations or the freedom to live their lives as they like even in this high-tech century. Gender bigotry is one of the most pressing concerns in today's society, and it can be seen in many different parts of the world. Women are browbeaten and swayed by their male accomplices in a variety of ways. Gender egalitarianism is vital for long-haul development. Giving women equivalent open doors is critical to advancement because they possess the leadership potential to impact the world. Gender-based violence can only be addressed via equality (Sonowal and Moran 67-70).

> In *Understanding Patriarchy*, Bell Hooks stated that a man-centered society is a dangerous social malady. Man-controlled society is a political-social framework that requires males to be intrinsically governing, better than everything favoured with the choice to run and go through mental and unquestionable hostility (Hooks 1-4).

To accomplish gender parity by 2030 for sustainable development, a prompt activity is expected to address the reasons for segregation that keep on restricting women's privileges in both the private and public domains. Patriarchal high-handedness and gender bigotry are a big concern, as it is currently one of the world's most pervasive abuses of basic human rights. Goals 5.2 and 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals recognize the importance of ending all forms of violence and destructive behaviour against women in order to eliminate gender inequity and achieve women's empowerment for sustainable development (Garcia-Morenoa and Amina 396-97). Hence, it is actually quite essential to analyze the position that women possess today, and contrast it to a few years ago. The following incidents from the three novels namely, *"Room", "The Pakistani Bride"* and "*When I Hit You, Or a Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife"* (all based on true events) echoes the terrible state of women and gender prejudice that still exists in society today:

Gender Bigotry and Abuse of Women in the Novel '*The Pakistani Bride'*

Bapsi Sidhwa depicts women from Parsi, Punjabi, Pakistani, and American society in her novel "*The Pakistani Bride*", which was published in 1983. The novel depicts the terrible situation of women who have been denied their rights. It demonstrates that men treat women like beasts, whether it is an educated American woman or an uneducated Pakistani woman.

The novel paints a particularly bleak portrait of womanhood in an illiterate and incompetent tribal society. Zaitoon and Carol, two important female characters in the story, reflect diverse challenges encountered by women in a male-dominated culture. These difficulties develop images of suffocating women's presence. The novel is based on the true incident of Zaitoon, an orphaned young girl who was kidnapped from the fields across the Indus by an old tribal who forced her to marry his nephew. The following lines from the novel describe the very first night of Zaitoon's marriage, where she realized how screwy, envious, aggressive, and wild her critical spouse Sakhi is:

> Sakhi overviewed his diffident bride with maintaining excitement. Here was a woman all his own, he thought with exclusively desire and pride, a woman with oddly thick lashes and large black eyes that had flashed in one look her entire sensuality. But, even

> as he thought this, the eroding envy of the previous few days unexpectedly flooded up in him in a deadly combination of scorn and fever. He tore the *ghoonghat* from her head holding her arms in a cold-blooded grasp he panted inarticulate hatred into her face. (Sidhwa 159-60)

Her life turned into a hellfire a month after her marriage. Her husband used to beat her up on the smallest pretext to demonstrate his dominance over her. It was no longer conceivable for her to live with him under the same roof. She made the decision to flee in order to get away from her husband, chaotic marriage, and terribly miserable life.

Carol, an American young lady in the novel, falls in love with Farukh, a Pakistani student, with whom she eventually marries. The relationship with Farukh which Carol deems alluring and courageous possessiveness towards her devolves into uncertainty and repugnance very soon. Carol had no choice but to adapt to Pakistani society's stifled sexuality where she is constantly pressured by men. Thus, in this novel women are depicted as a territory to be conquered by men. Several violent attempts have been made to take control of this territory.

Petrifying Captivity and Domination of a Woman in the Novel *'Room'*

The novel *Room* written by Emma Donoghue in 2010, depicts a woman's anguish throughout nightmarish captivity. The story is told through the perspective of Jack, a five-year-old boy who was trapped in a small room with his mother. Because that is all he has ever known, Jack believes that the lone room and the items it contains (including himself and Ma) are "real." Old Nick, who comes to Room late at night while Jack is concealed in a closet, is the only other person Jack has ever seen. When Old Nick assaults her mother on a regular basis, Jack listens to the squeaks of the bed:

> When Old Nick squeaks Bed, I tune in and tally fives on fingers, tonight it's 217 creaks. I always have to tally till he makes that gaspy sound and stops. I don't know what will happen if I didn't count, because I always do count. (Donoghue 46)

Old Nick abducted Ma when she was 19 years old and has held her captive for seven years. Jack is the result of one of these assaults. The novel exposes the depressed state of a woman who has been abducted and assaulted on a regular basis for seven years. In light of her precarious situation, she has no choice but to confront Old Nick's inhumane treatment. For seven years, Old Nick's domination and control made their lives a living nightmare. If they break or defy Old Nick's laws, they are punished or subjected to harsh treatment. Old Nick was once so enraged that he refused to feed them for a week and turned off the lights in the room:

> Ma's staring at the thermostat. Power cut. What's that? There's no power in anything just now. It's a strange kind of day. We have our cereal and brush teeth and get dressed and water plants. We try and fill Bath but after the first bit the water comes out all ice so we just wash with clothes. (Donoghue 85-86)

Abduction, incarceration, torture, and assault are the four major torments used to oppress and pacify a woman and a defenseless mother in this novel. Both the mother and the child suffer from acute mental instabilities as a result of these horrendous conditions.

Gender Bigotry and Squelching of a Woman (Wife) in the Novel '*When I Hit You Or, A Portrait of the Writer as A Young Wife*'

When I Hit You Or, a Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife, written by Meena Kandasamy in 2017, is a reflection on infatuation, marital violence, cruelty, and woman's

entanglement in an abusive marriage. The readers of the novel are immersed in the world of gender prejudice, a misanthrope spouse, a humiliated father who fears the embarrassment that a potential divorce would bring, and a mother who explains to her daughter to bear the things as the first year of marriage is always difficult. Her mother tells her that she will forget about her worries as time passes.

In *Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire*, Judith Butler states that Gender roles are constituted by society. Gender, according to her, is a set of societal expectations that each individual must meet (Butler 6). Even in this highly advanced era, tyranny against women is endless due to this gender-biased perspective. The novel depicts how gender-defined customs and behaviours can be maintained, regardless of one's education and status. It warns that even if a marriage appears to be "successful," it can be furious, severe, and oppressive if no one is watching. The narrator is frequently reminded by her husband that it is her gender i.e. womanhood, which is the issue, not his injurious behaviour. He has total control over her activities at home, outside, and even on the internet:

> There is no purpose behind why you ought to be on Facebook. It's narcissism. It's exhibitionism. It's an exercise in futility. I've said this to you many times. (Kandasamy 50)

When her husband forced she should disconnect from Facebook, she understood it is an act of professional self-destruction:

> In my temperamental circumstance, when he wishes me to discontinue myself off or cut off from Facebook, I know that it is an act of career suicide. But at this particular moment, contending with him will not get any solution. (Kandasamy 52)

Her quick withdrawal from Facebook is the first of several steps. Her husband devises his email password and offers it to her the same week:

> You can have this. I do not require it. I have faith in you. Okay. Do you trust me? I do. So? Do you believe me enough to share your passwords with me? I have never shared my passwords with someone else. So, you are hiding something? No. (Kandasamy 54)

To prove her argument, the narrator had no choice but to write down all of her passwords. His abuse finally drives her into the unbearable agony of quiet, which is exactly what her husband wanted from the start. He tried every worst trick to abuse her. She realized she couldn't win and needed to find another means to defend herself. She loses her uniqueness. She changes into the lady her husband demands. She satisfies him with her body, cooks whatever he likes, wears the clothes of his choice, deleted herself from Facebook, allows him to reply to and delete her emails, and quits acting like a normal human being.

Digital media has grown in popularity to the point that it connects people at unprecedented levels of contact, but it is also being utilized by a male-dominated society to harass and abuse women (Kaur and Gupta 196-201). As a result, as time and technology improve, new modes and strategies of agony against women emerge, and there is no end in sight. This novel takes the reader on a journey through the conceptions of destructive manliness and the male-controlled society that allows such viciousness to flourish.

Elaine Showalter writes in her essay *Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness* that women constitute a "muted group" in society while men form a "dominant group". Husbands, in any case, aim to silence their wives. The patriarchy produces a gendered presence, which defines what is masculine and feminine, what people should and should not do, and how individuals engage with each other and the world. The patriarchy creates the framework for these identities, and the entire concept of women's rights is critical in dismantling the male-

controlled society (Showalter 179-205). Therefore, after studying the current and former positions of women in society based on true events in these novels, it is clear that gender imbalance and violence against women must be eliminated in order to accomplish sustainable development goals.

Conclusion

Women's stature has risen as a result of technological improvement and the elimination of illiteracy, but their representation remains close to that of earlier suffering. The present paper highlighted patriarchal high-handedness, gender issues, and the amaranthine plight of women belonging to different societies. Due to gender bigotry women are still treated as second-class citizens in some communities, despite the fact that law enforcement authorities provide them with legal equality. Domestic violence is still pervasive, despite legal protections, and women are the primary victims. Gender equality is undeniably important for long-term growth. Women make up half of the population, so emphasizing their demands and interests in the growth of society, nation, and the globe at large is vital. Therefore, gender equality is essential for long-term development, and women are vital stakeholders on the path to sustainability. Hence, development, environmental sustainability, and the accomplishment of the SDGs all depend on gender equality and women's empowerment.

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Exploring Performativity in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*: A Study of Ashima's Metamorphosed Mannerism

Shweta Chaudhary
Research Scholar
Department of English
Chandigarh University
Mohali (Punjab) India
shwetdutt@gmail.com

Dr. Smarika Pareek
Associate Professor,
Department of English
Chandigarh University
Mohali (Punjab) India
smarika.uila@cumail.in

Abstract

The literary world is intrigued by the portrayal of women in diasporic novels because of its content and contemporary context. Women novelists are depicting women in a plethora of ways. Recent years have seen a significant shift in how women are portrayed in literature. Some of the many essential elements cited by numerous women writers include the portrayal of women either as an individual against the suppression and oppression of the patriarchy or is subtly represented as a transformation from traditional gender performances. However, the role of culture in shaping gender identity cannot be denied because it plays a vital role in shaping the gender construct of any society. Most of the accomplished female writers have paved the way for a significant shift in how women and gender themes are portrayed in literature. This paper attempts to study the transformation of Ashima's notion of gender identity and performance in light of Judith Butler's theory of Performativity .The purportedly simple transformation of Ashima in The Namesake *from Indian culture to the new one is challenging but simultaneously opens up for her new horizons of metamorphosed identity. Butler's theories of Gender Performativity emphasize that our gender identities are performed or played out by and for the inhabited society. Performativity can be defined as gender performances by bodies performing in certain ways that are exhibited by clothing, mannerisms, speech, and language, that have been uniquely male or female. The aim of the present study is to investigate Ashima's transformed mannerism as a part of her metamorphosed gender identity.*

Keywords: Performativity, Mannerism, Metamorphosis, Diaspora, Gender identity

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Introduction

The experiences of expatriation and transplanting, which have grown to be the most noticeable characteristics of diasporic writing, become deeply entwined with feelings of dissemination, alienation, rootlessness, marginalisation, and quest for identity. Jhumpa Lahiri is one of these authors who probe the psyche of the diaspora and talks from diasporic subject positions. Lahiri through the character of Ashima attempts to throw light on the transformation in performance of gender identity. Judith Butler, like that of every other poststructuralist theorist, attempts to dismantle some binary contradiction. By applying a Derridean perspective on J. L. Austin's "speech act theory," she goes beyond her forebears by asserting that not only language but gender and identity, in general, are also performative and that whatever one does, one is building her or his identity. Butler coined the term Gender Performance or Gender Performativity and draws upon Simon De Beauvoir: "one is not born a woman but rather becomes one" thus emphasizing gender identity cannot be biologically located. Butler being extensively influenced by Derrida considers woman as a signifier and draws upon multiple meaning that can be attached to it with reaching out for any final meaning. She sees gender as a social category that is defined in relation to one another. The body's performance according to gender roles is characterised by clothing, mannerism, speech and language. Gender just like the text has an unstable meaning as it is performed endlessly and therefore needs to be repeatedly reinvented. In her essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," Judith Butler asserts that gender becomes naturalized, woven so tightly into the social fabric that it seems like an essential element of reality instead of a conditional production of history. It's confusing how this occurs because these roles weren't constructed by us; rather, they were invented for us. Gender Performativity is a stylised repetition of acts through time. In fact, a hierarchy of gender exists, with some forms of gender being privileged while others are marginalized. Butler interprets the technical term "performative" as an action that not only communicates but also establishes an identity. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler discusses the relationship between gender and language, delineating that gender identities are constructed through language and that there is no gender identity that precedes language.

Women writers have been around for as long as literature existed but the beginning of the 20th century is an exhilarating dawn for women writers as people not only started taking their works seriously but also the novels, they produced did justice to the role women play in society. The women characters thus created by them were progressive and justified the way women's behaviour is conditioned owing to the social construct. Jhumpa Lahiri's, *The Namesake* is a text that presents the identity crisis, alienation and displacement of characters in a diasporic text. Culture plays a significant role in shaping the gender identity of an individual which simultaneously impacts his ability to comprehend his surroundings. In *The Namesake*, female characters play a key role in the development of the storyline either as subordinates or as independent individuals. Jhumpa Lahiri is a 20th century diasporic novelist who created women characters who are intellectually and financially less reliant on their male counterparts and were able to create a niche for themselves in their newly migrated homes. Ashima in *The Namesake* though doesn't challenge the notion of gender but assimilation of American culture helped her to create a space and independent identity for herself. "Migrant communities bear the imprint of diaspora, hybridization and difference in their very constitution" (Hall 232).

Gender is a social construct in a way that society tells what one should do as a man or

woman. In *Understanding Patriarchy*, Bell Hooks states "Patriarchy is the single most life-threatening social disease assaulting the male body and spirit in our nation" (Hooks 2). Bell Hooks as an author and cultural critic tries to point out the fact that women and men both are victims of patriarchy in a way that they cannot get out of the matrix of this social construct. It is not only the struggle to liberate women of the conditioning that they are weak but also remove the conviction of men that they are born physically and mentally stronger. This paper especially examines Ashima's metamorphosed gender identity in terms of changed mannerisms, behaviour and thought processes. The transformation of Ashima from a fearful, dependent homebound girl to an independent woman who makes choices as per her will is a result of her assimilation of the new culture. In her book, *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir says; "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman. No biological, psychical or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in society; it is civilisation as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product . . . that is called feminine" (Beauvoir 293). Culture plays a great role in conditioning an individual's behaviour and helps in creating a visible contrast so that men can be differentiated from women.

Ashima's Metamorphosed Mannerism as Gender Performativity

Ashima's gender and cultural identity underwent certain changes because of the changed geographical location. Ashima, born and brought up in a patriarchal society relies entirely on her father in making choices representative of the Indian gender construct that puts women in marginalized space where she does not have the freedom and authority to make choices. Indian culture has its own construct for women which they are bound to follow. Ironically without the realization of this domination, Ashima accepts everything as her destiny because that is what she is conditioned for, "It was only after the betrothal that she'd learned his name" (Lahiri 9). Simone de Beauvoir writes: "While sex differences are linked to biological differences between male and female, gender differences are imposed socially or even politically, by constructing contrasting stereotype of masculinity and femininity" (Beauvoir 258). In patriarchy power belongs to men; the ones who are considered as guardians of women. This idea is presented by Lahiri when Ashoke's father asked Ashima whether she will be able to live in an alien land to which Ashima responds, "Won't he be there" (Lahiri 9). The answer clearly represents dependability, a need for someone who can sort out things; something Ashima being a female will not be able to manage. The transition of Ashima's gender identity from a submissive fearful individual to an independent confident one starts the moment she lands in America though it takes her time to decondition herself from the traditional ways and assimilate the culture of the new place she lives in now. Robert E. Park and Ernest W. in their 1921 book *The Introduction to the Science of Sociology* by Burgess defined assimilation as, "a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons or groups, and by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated in a common cultural life" (Park and Burgess 736). However, in the *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*; "assimilation is the name given to the process or processes by which peoples of diverse racial origins and different cultural heritages, occupying a common territory, achieve a cultural solidarity sufficient at least to

sustain national existence" (Gordon 63). Alba and Nee in their 2003 book *Remaking the American Mainstream* offer a less polarized perspective on assimilation processes. The authors acknowledge that immigrants in America "may not intentionally seek to assimilate, [but that] the cumulative effect of pragmatic decisions aimed at successful adaptation can give rise to changes in behavior" (Alba and Nee 38).

The text finds reference to Ashima initially missing her home badly and trying to connect with her relatives. When Gogol was born, she missed her family badly as she was alone in the hospital and she knew that if it would have been her hometown, she would have her family members surrounding her. She is saddened by the idea that her son is not welcomed as in Bengal. She is filled with an emotion of pity for her son as he missed elderly blessings. She has been brought up in overprotective surroundings where she relied on others emotionally and physically. Loneliness frightens her as she lives in a house full of people which she overcomes by reading Bengali novels. She struggles with this loneliness when she is in the hospital to give birth to her first child. Ashima's struggle of being in an alien land is represented by Lahiri as:

> Ashima thinks her child will be born in a place most people enter either to suffer or to die. There is nothing to comfort her in the off-white tiles of the floor, the off-white panels of the ceiling, the white sheets tucked tightly into the bed. In India, she thinks to herself, women go home to their parents to give birth, away from husbands and in-laws and household cares, retreating briefly to childhood when the baby arrives. (Lahiri 21)

But in the later part of the novel when Ashoke has to shift to Cleveland for nine months because of a grant funded by Colleague's University in Ohio, Ashima chooses to stay back in Massachusetts. A clear indication of her becoming an independent transnational who is confident enough and can survive alone. This transition is more of a surprise to Ashima's family also.

> At first it was assumed that his parents would shut up the house, or rent it out to students, and that his mother would go too. But then his mother had surprised them, pointing out that there would be nothing for her to do in Ohio for nine months, that his father would be busy all day at the lab, and that she preferred to stay in Massachusetts, even if it meant staying in the house alone. (Lahiri 144)

Ashima, as her name suggests, without boundaries emerges as an individual who adapts to the situations as per changing times. She personifies courage when she opts for a life in a foreign country and lives in gracefully. Ashima never let her displacement from her native place lead her towards decline; she evolves as an empowered intellectual. Her journey towards intellectual and emotional independence starts with the upbringing of her children. She got educated about American culture along with her children.

> She teaches him to memorize a four-line children's poem by Tagore, and the names of the deities adorning the ten-handed goddess Durga during pujo: Sarswati with her swan and Kartik with his peacock to her left, Lakshmi with her owl and Ganesh with his mouse to her right. Every afternoon Ashima sleeps but nodding off she switches the television to channel 2, and tells Gogol to watch Sesame Street and The Electric Company, in order to keep up with the English he uses at nursery school. (Lahiri 54)

Ashima's acceptance of the job in an American workplace helps her in connecting with the natives of the place. This part-time job provides Ashima with an opportunity to befriend her American colleagues which helped her in shedding off many misconceptions about their culture; "She works at the library to pass the time – she has been going regularly for years, taking her children to story hour when they were young and checking out Magazines and books of knitting patterns for herself, and one day Mrs. Buxton, the head librarian, asked if she would be interested in a part-time position" (Lahiri 162).

The moment the communication gap between individuals from different cultures removes, the misconception about each other also starts to fade. The liberal gender construct of America was accepted by Ashima as she lives alone, works in a library, engages herself in some constructive activity and enjoys her newly discovered freedom, "She is friendly with the other women who work at the library, most of them also with grown children. A number of them live alone, as Ashima does now, because they are divorced. They are the first American friends she has made in her life" (Lahiri 162). A connection with her library colleagues helped her understand that being independent is a part of their culture be it female or male. Ashima realizes with this association that being self-reliant is an American way of life which for sure is not gender-biased. Ashima has learnt and realised this only because of migration and this very idea gives her a sense of pride. Her statement shows her understanding of the term independence, a concept alien to her earlier as being a woman she always relied on men in the house.

Another important challenge faced by her as an immigrant parent is transmitting the core value of their native culture. Ashima and Ashoke have been religiously doing it by celebrating traditional festivals and arranging gatherings with their Bengali friends so that their children learn the traditional rituals. The actual struggle for Ashima starts when Gogol and Sonia grow up and find the American lifestyle more fascinating and thrilling. Initially she resisted Gogol dating Maxine, an American and both parents try to tell him the consequence of Indian-American marriage: "They've even gone so far as to point out examples of Bengali men they know who've married Americans, marriages that have ended in divorce" (Lahiri 117). On one of Maxine's visits to their home Ashima does not like Maxine calling her husband by his first name, a thing not allowed in her culture, calling elders by their name is considered disrespectful in her culture she herself never called Ashoke by his name as a mark of respect so this particular incident seemed quite humiliating to her but it is a practice absolutely fine in American culture. Ashima is hurt by her son's attitude of giving Maxine preference over her but gradually she accepts. Ashima's initial denial of mixed marriages is a communitarian negation of marrying a person of another community which is why she never shares Gogol and Maxine's relationship with her Bengali friends: "By now, Ashima knows that Gogol spends his nights with Maxine, sleeping under the same roof as her parents, a thing Ashima refuses to admit to her Bengali friends" (Lahiri 166). Ashima's approach also changes when she starts accepting the culture of the country she has inhabited for a couple of decades as she gains new insights from the broken marriage of Gogol and Moushumi which ended in divorce. She had a sense of satisfaction that they did not drag the relationship on for the sake of others.

> But fortunately they have not considered it their duty to stay married, as the Bengalis of Ashoke and Ashima's generation do. They are not willing to accept, to adjust, to settle for something less than their ideal of happiness. The pressure has given way, in the case of subsequent generations, to American common sense. (Lahiri 276)

Ashima in due course of time transforms her views about inter communal relationship and approves Sonia's decision to marry Ben who is "half-Jewish, half-Chinese" (Lahiri 170), acceptance of her daughter's relation to a man of different culture illustrates the ability of Ashima to understand that self-fulfilment is a better option than obeying cultural norms unwillingly. Ashima in the latter half of the novel grows up to realize that in long run strengthening individualistic norms of identity is much more important than following responsibility for the sake of culture.

Conclusion

Ashima after marriage landed in a country with an independent culture where people proudly bear the badge of freedom contrary to her traditional upbringing of being content with the role of a subordinate who assists the males of the family. Ashima's movement towards adapting new cultural norms like being independent, celebrating festivals, driving a car, working in a library, or switching from her only Bengali friends to American friends and enjoying cross-cultural bonds brings a sense of empowerment. Moreover, Ashima rediscovers a new sort of gender mannerism that signifies flexibility to assimilate and adapt to a foreign culture. However, through these changes, she frees herself to be associated with a particular part and emerges as a universal being. Lahiri through the character of Ashima set forth an example that gender role is not only bodily performance but behavioural conditioning that is much defined by the norms and traditions of the inhabited society. Thus, living in a different society she realises that gender performances are not stagnant and are in a constant state of flux that keeps on evolving in order to make the world a better place irrespective of the biological sex someone is born with. Culture helps in learning good traits thus making the world a global village in actual sense where culture progresses because of individuals irrespective of their gender. Culture is not stable; it is ever-changing and these changes point at multiple cultures getting intertwined together reframing new gender roles and performances for an ever changing dynamic world and society.

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Politics of Motherhood in Perumal Murugan's Trilogy: A Feministic Discourse

Vimala Johnshi Rani A
Research Scholar
Department of English and Cultural Studies
Christ (Deemed to be University)
Bangalore (Karnataka) India
vimala.rani@res.christuniversity.in

Abstract

Since the 1970s, one of the most prominent feminist discourses about women's rights has focused on motherhood issues. The issue of public recognition of motherhood has been central to the reproduction debate. This article challenges exploring the relationship between women's oppression and their assumed affiliation with motherhood. Perumal Murugan's selected trilogy attempts to comprehend the societal disparagement of women. He is the only Indian author who has made a bold attempt to give voice to the disappointments and frustrations of feminist discourses on motherhood that evolved trajectories and complicated terrain of motherhood. Murugan delves into a woman's quest to fulfil herself as a human being and her traditional roles as a daughter, wife, and mother. This article serves as a catalyst for shedding light on the Ponna's struggle to secure self-identity as a mother-to-be and the multiple levels of oppression, including sexual pressure that women face to achieve institutionalised motherhood in our society.
Keywords: Motherhood, feminine identity, patriarchal society, gender bias, Perumal Murugan.

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Introduction

Today the human race can rule the world. According to history, it took millions of years to achieve this. When man progressed from the animal stage to civilisation, he became a distinct individual. Bananas were the human race's primary meal. The human species has adapted its biology to the geological conditions of the earth. As a result, the human species has developed different cultural characteristics. In this sense, the Indian subcontinent has archaeological biographies of the low-lying Tamil region stretching back over two thousand years. Literature, inscriptions, archaeological finds, coinage, and allusions to other countries can all be used to trace Tamil history. Literary evidence indicates that ancient Sangam literature is one of them. All of these are references to a period in civilisation when biological values were valued highly. As a result, literature reflects the times it was produced in. Literature serves as a cultural archive as well as a mirror for society. As a result, fictional forms such as novels and short tales play a crucial role in reflecting the values of society.

People are distinguished from animals by their ability to devise and live by their own sets of rules. There are certain morals and rules that must be followed. Giving birth to new life

is one of the most noticeable characteristics of all organisms, and it is required to maintain and balance the life cycle. Humans have a different concept of procreation; for humans, procreation or giving birth to a child is a source of pride. Because the baby is supposed to be the source of pride in a culture, if a married couple does not have a child within a certain period of time, everyone starts questioning them about having a child. If not sooner, people begin spreading rumours about their marital life, claiming that it is difficult for them to conceive, allaying the couple's concerns about having a baby, at least for the time being. Society frequently blames the woman for the problem, even if the fault lies with the husband. When a woman struggles to conceive, the man's family tries to divorce her and remarry him. Having a child is a meaningful way to demonstrate one's pride in the community, and married couples only receive respect from their families when they have a child:

> Infertility is a Universal problem affecting 7-I5% of all marriages. The awareness of childlessness is associated with profound psychological shock, a sense of disbelief, and mental trauma, which may affect the couple's psychological well-being and interpersonal relationships. In India, the social pressure to become parents is even more because of the joint family system and the influence of elders. It is the woman who is often blamed for infertility and bears the brunt of social abuse of being "sterile." (Jindal 30)

Complicated Terrain of Motherhood

Due to their infertility troubles, Ponna and Kali face a slew of social issues. They reduce the amount of time they spend interacting with others. They avoid social gatherings like weddings, family functions, and parties since everyone asks about their infertility, and some even offer suggestions. Relationships are affected psychologically by such situations. They try to keep their distance from society due to this trauma; wherever they go, the thought of having a child haunt them, so they try to keep to themselves. According to an article *Socio Economic Problems of Infertility* (2014)

> . . . as time progressed, multiple attempts of failed pregnancies caused the couple to become less social. It began as a declining invitation to events like weddings and holidays, then social withdrawal from friends and even family members. Based on where the couple is from, withdrawal ranged from meeting people very occasionally to a complete absence of social life, shutting out almost everyone except for in-laws and a few close friends. (Kumar 23).

These personal tragedies impact couples' lives; whether they like it or not, they are forced to live their lives for others. Even if the couples' do not want to think about their problem, society forces them to. They instil in the couples a sense of shame. Typically, women are the ones who find themselves in this situation. Society always blames the woman for infertility; they never consider the male's health, even if he is suffering from it; instead, they blame the woman and try to remarry him. This illness is prevalent in rural India, where most women are mistreated, and some attempt suicide. According to an article about the state of women, "Children are so important that in traditional life the inability to bear children is considered a great calamity, and the woman who fails to deliver children suffers humiliation and sometimes even ridicule

or abuse" (Maskun37).

Trajectory of Deity

Deity refers to people who have given their lives for the greater good of the community, gaining status equal to that of God. According to the dictionary, a deity is a supernatural being worshipped by individuals who think it controls or exerts force over some aspect of the world. They stand in the face of peril, willing to lay down their lives and sacrifice their souls to protect their people. "A deity of human origin is not an actual God created by humans (or other mortal beings), but a de facto god who has created a universe or sentient race or achieved some other achievement worthy of a true God." They were ordinary individuals before sacrificing blood for their culture and became a deity to their clan members. The deity may change depending on the people's culture and where they live. Even within the same village, it will be distinct. They have a family deity to whom they offer unique offerings on certain occasions. The concept of divinity may differ depending on the people and their cultural traditions. Each group has its own style of worshipping God. Each deity has a unique attribute or divine characteristic.

Patriarchy Controls Motherhood

The guardians of the greater village deities are Ayyanar, Munishwar, and Karuppasami. They are always positioned on the hamlet's outskirts or at the village's entrance. Their job is to defend humans from threats such as evil spirits. Kali appears as a dead spirit in the novel A Trial by Silence and scares everyone who travels by his field. The guardian deities Ayynar, who stand tall on the hamlet's edges, keep the evil spirits at bay and refuse to let any demonic entity into the community. These gods are usually armed to the teeth. With weapons in hand, the demon was crushed on the other side. Many functions and rituals will take place in front of the deity. People come together to pray and make offerings. People here sacrifice goats, chickens, and pigs to their God. Marriage and ear-piercing will take place when family members deliver their offerings.

Sustained Female Emancipation

Couples who have never had children believe that only God can provide for them and help them conceive. Childless women in the Amman temple tie a small cradle to symbolise their desire for a child. In the hopes of having a kid soon, they place the cradle on a tree on the temple grounds. Due to ritual practice, religion and God provide moral support for people who want to have children. Women would fast for a day, ignite a lamp in their mouths, and place it on their tummies for anything to swell in the womb. They cooked food and offered it free of charge to childless married couples as a form of prayer, with those who ate praying for the couple to have a child. "*Every man is a divinity in disguise*, *a God playing the fool*," said Ralph Waldo Emerson and C. Scott, who define a deity as "a being with powers greater than those of ordinary humans, but who interacts with humans, positively or negatively, in ways

that carry humans to new levels of consciousness, beyond the grounded preoccupations of everyday life" (Emerson 95).

Kali and Ponna began to romance and even had sexual encounters after leaving the temple in *One Part Woman*. They never consider God or aliens to be divine. They are cared for as if they were members of the family. They believed that they would soon have a child if they had sexual relations there because their divinity would help them conceive. They would have felt it was awful if they had believed God was something else, but that was not the case. They made sure that the divinity belonged to their clan. They believe in the curse of their forefathers. Kali's grandmother, who believed in the curse, insisted that Kali and Ponna do penance at the Devatha temple for the forefather's damnation. "Perform all of thine deeds with a mind focused on the Divine, renounce attachment, and look at success and failure with the equal eye, for spirituality implies equanimity." (Dvaipayana 112)

Motherhood as a Single-Minded Identity

Ponna begged God that her womb would fill with anything this month after completing the procedures. She is hopeful that she will be pregnant by the end of the month, even if her menstrual cycle is a day late. Her rituals gave her hope that one day she might be pregnant. Kali's house seemed haunted, like someone had died there if your menstrual cycle was regular. Every month, this was the scene. On the other hand, Kali and Ponna's confidence in their God remained unshaken. They went to different temples with the same request and the same hope that one of the Gods would help them have a kid. Devatha's fury has not been quenched despite Kali and Ponna's efforts. Ponna risked her life by executing a rite on the top of the Dandeeswarar temple's walls, where one must be alert and act rapidly. Ponna did it out of dread, but she wanted to do it since she had heard it had helped a lady become pregnant, so she did it.

The Pilgrim Progress

A pilgrim is someone who embarks on a religious journey for spiritual purposes. It's a trip to pursue life's meaning, truth, and values, and a pilgrimage walk might help you relax. People take spiritual walks to get away from the stresses of ordinary life. It's a journey that's both spiritual and God-centered. God's solace alleviated Kali's sadness, and the stroll made him feel the source of relief or consolation. Due to the pilgrimage trek, Kali was able to experience real life. For the first time in his life, he has the opportunity to meet new people and go to new places. "The whole point of travelling is not to carry burdens. If we insist on carrying everything, we might as well stay put. Our people desire to travel, but they don't know-how. Come with me. I will show all sorts of people.'" (Murugan 196). Nallayan taught Kali how to see life in a new light. Pilgrimage walks are spiritual, but they also assist people in calming their minds.

> She was born to us after Manchammi. Seven years ago, her mother conceived her when she went to the midday rituals at the temple. The deity himself is born to us in the form of this child. We can call that God by various names. How lovely it is that we

> can do that! There might be one God, but the names are many. As for us, this little one is our goddess. That's why I call her by all these names of deities. (Murugan 198).

Kali has found himself on the path of a pilgrim. He meets a wide range of people and has a wide range of interactions with each of them. Nallayyan's interaction with everyone on the trek caught Kali off guard. He was fascinated by how a man could know so many people, and he enjoyed walking with Nallayyan. During his stroll, he comes across a 70-year-old man who is carrying his daughter on his shoulder. Kali wondered why he never referred to her by her first name. The man observed, "She's from God." After visiting the temple for the midday rites, his wife became pregnant. As a result, Kali detested Ponna for sleeping with someone in the name of God and ritual. Kali is bewildered about how he can play with and touch a child who is not his. The man replies, "who is to discriminate between god's creatures? Who does not have a lack in their lives?" (Murugan 199). There is no discrimination in God's creation. As this is yours and theirs, people, the humans, discriminate. However, in creation, everyone is on an equal footing. The old man has no qualms about having a God-given child, "The deity has given me the joy of carrying and playing with this child. My only concern is that I need to take care of what God has given me" (Murugan 199).

Culture and Tradition

Tradition and cultural practice are turning points in Kali and Ponna's life. The idea of sending her to the temple celebration in the name of tradition appealed to me as a childless lady. Due to custom and culture, they are compelled to attend the temple celebration. According to tradition, women who do not have children are welcome to participate in the celebration. In this environment, women are implicitly blamed for everything in order to conceal men's core problem. It's a subtle trap where women engage in societal beliefs without realising it. Society intervenes in an individual's life and corrects the misbehaviour. Complications arise when family members are found to be at fault. It becomes a tool for society and men to use.

In Perumal Murugan's trilogy, women are the ones who suffer. In one instance, women are singled out for not having children. During a lonely harvest, Ponna mourns as a widow, but she gives birth to a son, but her happiness is conditional on kali.

> They pushed me away because I was childless. Now even though I have a child on the way, they will shun me because I am a widow. Look what my life has become, Venga. I cannot take the lead and take part in anything anymore. He has left me in this state' (Murugan 160).

In *Trial by Silence*, it's even worse because Ponna has Kali and a child with her, but Kali punishes her by refusing to look at her face. In three novels, he even refers to her as a whore, "you whore! You have cheated me!' he was breathless.' You will not be happy. You have cheated me, you whore. . ." (Murugan 240). Men have an easy time labelling women as prostitutes. Similarly, the greater culture is eager to pronounce judgement on women. Kali calls Ponna a whore because she slept with a stranger. Again, Ponna believes she is ready to leave Kali because her love for her is great, and Kali will not forsake her if she has a child. She attended the temple feast, but her beloved Kali called her a whore. "A woman meets her fate alone... can't do anything about it," Githa Hariharan writes in *The Thousand Faces of Night*

(2001). "When you marry, it goes to him, and you never get it back" (Hariharan 28).

The circumstance and the society that dominates women remain unchanged, as these are the rules that women should follow. Women who go beyond this are referred to in society as prostitutes. "Women accept traditions, repeat them, impose them on their kids," Charlotte Perkins Gilman writes in her book *The Man-Made World* (2001), (Gilman 165). This is especially true for women. Throughout history, they have been believed to be completely inferior to men in terms of honour, rank, and reputation.

Despite the fact that Kali and Ponna are childless, their lives have been ruined by social expectations, religious dogmatism, and traditional conventions. Society assumes that a couple needs a kid, and society dictates people's lives. Expectations are painful, and they are the root of many problems. Harriet Taylor and John Stuart Mill said in their work *The Subjection of Women* (2001) that "the love of power and the love of liberty are in eternal antagonism" (Mill 94). This conflict is portrayed in Ponna's helplessness, as she is caught between the authority of society and her passion for Kali. In the twenty-first century, the development of feminism provided women with the opportunity to speak out against society for their own betterment. This is not an anti-male movement. It's about their right to equality and freedom in society, just like men. Society is complete when men and women are treated equally. We should all be feminists, according to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. She claims that a nearby male acquaintance instilled in her the idea of feminism and taught her the phrase. According to Adichie, men and women, are the same.

Conclusion

According to Perumal Murugan's secret message, there is a problem with Kali, although it is not depicted as a major concern. Simultaneously, she is blamed for everything without fault because her neighbours desire to dig into each other's affairs and gossip about them. Women's conditions will improve when a men-centric society evolves to healthy gender ideas. Men and women both have weaknesses, but criticising women only leads to partial discrimination and shows that men can do anything. Even still, if a woman does it, she becomes a talking point. Perumal Murugan comes to the conclusion that men and women are the same. Women, on the other hand, are seen as pleasure givers who are denied the right to make their own decisions under the cover of culture and custom. Because they are both creatures and humans, the change should take place there. Cultural practises are formed in order to live, yet women are today the ones who suffer as a result of culture. Every individual should be aware that they are all human beings. Individuals, rather than society, are in command of their own life. While society may construct several laws and norms, it is up to the individual to determine whether or not they are correct. Women who are treated as the other sex should change in order to develop healthy male-female relationships.

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Tabooing 'Ageing in Women': Paradoxes of Feminist Perspectives

Mahua Bhattacharyya
Research Scholar
Department of Humanistic Studies
Indian Institute of Technology (BHU) Varanasi
Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh) India
mahuabhattacharyya.rs.hss20@itbhu.ac.in

Ajit K Mishra
Associate Professor
Department of Humanistic Studies
Indian Institute of Technology (BHU) Varanasi
Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh) India
akmishra.hss@iitbhu.ac.in

Abstract

The feminists have delayed the journey to address the problems and issues of ageing women because of the social and cultural taboos associated with it. Social ageing along with biological ageing also relegates women to the level of the 'other'. The primary objective of this study is to find out the main causes behind their deprived condition and the reason behind feminist writers' lack of a sustained call for ageing women's rights or situation within the discipline. The aim of the present paper is also to focus on the scholarly works on ageism which are never celebrated in feminist studies but need to be highlighted for addressing the problems of ageing population which are now leading to the feminization of ageing. The present paper is presented as a scoping review to identify knowledge gaps in feminist studies, study a body of existing literature, clarify multiple concepts and investigate research conduct. The condition of ageing women in India becomes problematic because of the class, caste, gender, age, widowhood, sacrifice for the family, suppression of individuality, poverty, physical and emotional dependence, internalised guilt and lack of healthcare facilities. Their condition becomes even more vulnerable because of the partial scholarly silence, lack of interest and continuous growth in the ageing population. More research in the area of feminist studies is required to come up with specific solutions for different groups of ageing women including younger widows, aged widows staying in joint families or old-age homes, aged spinsters and elderly prostitutes.
Keywords: Age-Shaming, Scholarly Silence, Self-Deprivation, Marginalisation, Dependency, Feminization of Ageing

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Ageing in women has been socially and culturally considered taboo because women who lose their reproductive ability after menopause are not considered a part of the mainstream population. Ageing leads to the decline, deterioration and loss of sexual identity for women (King xii). The biological process of ageing thus leads women to be considered as the 'other' socially, economically and culturally. The study of ageing or Gerontology has shaped as an emerging discipline because it has become an important concern on the global

level. The reasons behind this growing concern are deeply rooted in skewed economic status, social imbalances, discrimination, and prejudices. J. Brooks Bouson in her book *Shame and the Ageing Woman: Confronting and Resisting Ageism in Contemporary Women's Writings* has revealed the fact that even western feminists have not preferred to talk about the 'old age' as they consider it 'a shameful secret' in 'youth-oriented and appearance-driven' cultures. Bouson has also pointed towards the feminist avoidance of gendered ageism and the social devaluation of both ageing body and ageing identity in western culture. The deeply embedded shaming ideology has also overshadowed the early texts of women writers on the topic of ageing.

In earlier studies on 'ageing in women', feminist writers have either found an awkward silence over the issue because of the deep social and cultural taboo or they have faced almost no recognition for their works written on ageing or age-shaming. Simone de Beauvoir herself was in her early sixties when she wrote *Old Age* which was originally published in French in 1970 and was later published in English in 1972 under the title "The Coming of Age". That this extensive critical study by Beauvoir has largely been ignored by mainstream feminist scholars, is "a sign of just how the subject of ageing has remained a taboo area even years after Beauvoir set out to break the silence surrounding the 'shameful secret' of old age in our culture" (Bouson 4). Later, critics like Susan Sontag have particularly focused on the gendered experience of biological ageing in our society where elderly women are doubly marginalised because of both their age and gender. In her 1972 essay "The Double Standard of Ageing," Sontag opines, "growing older is mainly an ordeal of the imagination—a moral disease, a social pathology—intrinsic to which is the fact that it afflicts women much more than men. It is particularly women who experience growing older . . . with such distaste and even shame" (Sontag 72). Another cultural critic, Kathleen Woodward has shared her own experience of ageing by stating how the 'anxiety and fear' held the elderly women back from expressing their feelings and creating an 'awkward silence' (Woodward 7, 21). Similarly, Barbara Hillyer has not only identified the feminist scholar's negligence of the experiences of elderly women but has also attempted to break the silence in her essay "The Embodiment of Older Women: Silences" (1998). Lately, scholars in the emerging field of age studies have started investigating "the damaging impact of ageism on society in general and on women in particular" (Bouson 6). Margaret Cruikshank has pointed toward this indifference by saying, "we in women's studies have averted our gaze from women over sixty, even if we are over sixty ourselves" (Cruikshank 153).

In line with the western feminist discourse, the problem of ageing is, like in many other countries, also a neglected subject in India (Chaurasia and Srivastava 497). The number of aged women is growing, and this worldwide increase is caused by the decline in death rates. The number of elderly people in India "has tripled over the last 50 years" and 'Indian older population' now represents 8.6% of the total according to the 2011 census (Chakraborti 53; Hossain et al. 3). The fact that women survive even with many long-term diseases or physical disabilities lead them to long-term suffering (Bouson 96). According to Chakraborti, 77 percent of the centenarians in 1995 were women and 70 percent of the world's elderly population will be in Asia in 2025 (Chakraborti 53). India is one of the major countries in Asia where the growth of the elderly population is very rapid and the problem becomes even more intense with the poor economic condition. The social ageing caused by early widowhood also brings age consciousness in women and thus leads them to the marginalisation because of the social stigma associated with it.

Srivastava and Mohanty have highlighted the fact that an increasing number of

elders have started living alone without the support of the family and enduring economic vulnerability with the help of the table containing the percentage distribution of elderly based on their living arrangement and economic dependence on the family members (Srivastava and Mohanty 2). The shame of the ageing body along with the guilt and fear of dependency, vulnerability and incapability to support the family at the old age, lead to psychological disability. The recent focus on 'healthy ageing' or 'active ageing' has made the elders even more conscious about their ageing appearance and also leads them to a further marginalised condition as this provides an anti-ageing model which decides their worth on the basis of their appearance (Bouson 95). India is a country where the female sex ratio is generally lesser than the male sex ratio but the 'ageing sex ratio' is "70 men to 100 women" (Ahmed-Ghosh 4). Ahmed-Ghosh has thoroughly studied statistics to state that the "increase in the aging non-working but economically dependent population" indicates the problems expected in the future (4).

Critics like Martha Holstein, Hurd Clarke and Bouson have addressed the problems of ageing women by categorising them on the basis of their disabilities at different stages of life like late forties, early sixties or seventies. But for Indian women, the same age group might not face the homogeneous identity crisis or similar kind of marginalisation as their categories are decided based on their social status. Though the age of sixty or sixty-five has been defined as old age on the basis of employment eligibility, Indian society defines it not by one's biological age but by social roles. Therefore, biological and social aging can be overlapped with each other but have the possibility to maintain a gap between the two. For instance, 'early widowhood' in India could also be included in social ageing. Since women's role in society is mainly decided in terms of their sexuality and reproductive ability, the widowed girl of young age is also marginalised along with the aged lady in her post-menopause condition because for both of them the reproductive role is invalid either for a moral or physical cause. Thus, when a woman enters a 'desexualized age' then "her 'use value' is diminished" (Ahmed-Ghosh 5). Therefore, social aging can be started when a woman steps into widowhood no matter what her age is. Indian society tries to preserve the moral and cultural values of traditional Brahmanical order which prevents a realistic analysis of the deprived condition of aged women. The Brahminical ideals try to secure high moral values by exhorting the family to take care of their old members (Ahmed-Ghosh 3). But for a longer time, the family as an ideal societal unit is used (or abused) at the level of both the policy-makers and individuals to retain patriarchal control over the structure. Consequently, most mainstream Indian academicians have preferred not to expose the reality of marginalised members within a family because of the threat it brings against the concept of a family being a sole provider to all its members, be it male or female and young or old (3). In the long-established tradition, the Hindu family is ideally built on the "individual and collective rights and responsibilities of family members, and community relationships" (5). Though all the values are not followed by the individuals in more recent life, the gendered construction of power hierarchy within the family still exists as it is "deeply ingrained" in the culture (13).

The rights and responsibilities of individuals are generally determined on the basis of age, gender and kinship patterns (5). However, the male aging identity is determined by age but the female aging identity is determined by marital status (Agnes 51). Women are always seen as bound to familial relationships and their status as individuals is almost negligible. In the patriarchal society, "women were seen as lesser than men whose main purpose was to serve men" (Ahmed-Ghosh 7). As per Manusmriti, the Indian woman's identity always depends on one or the other male members like the father, son or husband (7). As marriage is

an important social institution in India, the societal responsibility of a woman is mainly decided by her relationship with her family members through marital relationship. While the aged spinster or the prostitute in the later age are generally marginalised by society as they do not have any family to take care of themselves (Gadekar 71). Even the feminists and female academicians do not feel comfortable discussing the condition of the aged female sex workers in India because the group involves a deep cultural shame. They are generally stigmatised because of their profession and in the later stages of their lifecycle they even face more hardship when they become economically dependent (70).

There are multiple factors determining the status of housewives in modern Indian households. Along with the husband's economic status, the wife's ability to bear children (or even sons) empowers her and the inability to give birth to sons also reduces her familial status as the son is considered to be the legal descendant of the family (Ahmed-Ghosh 7). The "status for the daughter-in-law in the patrilocal residence" gets enhanced because of "the demise of her mother-in-law or the widowing of the mother-in-law" (7). She even mentions the difference that Indian widowers remain as head of the household but the status of the women gets lowered soon after the death of their husbands (11). For a very long time, the Indian widows face discrimination or indignities socially and culturally either as the emblem of misfortune or being the victims of evil practices like sati (Bhattacharyya and Singh 1). Even after the state's concern regarding the protection of the widow's rights through law-making (The Hindu Widow Remarriage Act), the ill-treatment or marginalisation of widows inside the families continues. Bhattacharyya and Singh have highlighted the stark reality of the widows who take shelter in heritage cities after getting ostracised or disowned by the family (2). With the close study of two old-age homes in Varanasi, they prove that widows live their vulnerable lives with illiteracy, poverty and illness (11).

The abuse of elderly people is the most rampant but largely hidden secret of society (Ahmed-Ghosh 11). The most often noted abuse could be both verbal (66.34%) and physical (45%) within or outside the family (Chaurasia and Srivastava 498). Generally, the widows and their relatives prefer to hide the secret of abuse because bringing them into the light can not only lead all of them towards public shame but might also lead to even more deteriorating situations for the elderly person (Ahmed-Ghosh 11). Being aware of the inability to contribute financially and physically to the household, the elderly women develop internalised guilt which along with the deteriorating health, loss of memory and fear of death make their condition even more vulnerable (11). Bouson has supported this fact of 'internalized shame' by explaining how it causes self-deprivation and othering (Bouson 106). The gerontologists like Covan, Lorenz have pointed out the fact that the western women in late eighties deny to be called 'aged women' and feel proud at their survival from chronic illness even in their nineties (Bouson 97). On the other hand, Indian scholars like Dessety, Patnam and many others have shown how Indian women internalise guilt after being considered by the family members as a burden or even curse themselves for their longer lives (Ahmed-Ghosh 11, Bhattacharyya & Singh 10). The Indian widows of 80 or above age group are the victims of maximum abuse because of their immobility and poor health condition irrespective of the rural and urban areas (Chaurasia and Srivastava 498; Ahmed-Ghosh 11). They even suffer from several health problems due to multiple reasons including poor infrastructure, social inequality, malnutrition, unattended chronic diseases and the lesser "availability, accessibility and affordability of health care" (Mane 1). The situation has become even more problematic for elderly women without the support and care of family members in the nuclear family setups in recent years (1). Although the women sacrifice their whole lives to take care of their husbands

and children as part of their familial duties, they live mostly unattended at their later age. The depression and social exclusion of elderly people in India are still less attended areas by researchers (Hossain et al. 3).

Although feminist critics and scholars have not denied the problematic reality of ageing, they have to some extent delayed the discussion on the issues and concerns of ageing women. It is only feminist gerontologists like Toni Calasanti who have brought into focus the issues of 'gendered ageing'. Toni Calasanti has shared her personal experience in her essay "A Feminist Confronts Ageism":

> I have experienced greater acceptance of feminist work and feel a part of a community of scholars; at the same time, I continue to struggle with the deeper levels of ageism in society, both within the disciplines in which I work and within myself. (152)

However, the feminist critic and gerontologist Martha Holstein in the book *Women in Late Life: Critical Perspectives on Gender and Age*, has concluded on a positive note that the "old women, understood through feminist lenses, have not been well attended in gerontology or women's or gender studies", but the "situation is beginning to change, slowly" and thus there is a "growing interdisciplinary literature on gender and aging" (Holstein 17).

Even in our media representations "graying men are seen as 'mature with authority' while graying women are seen as 'old and sloppy'" (Ahmed-Ghosh 14). It is sad but in reality, the women's status is decided based on their physical attributes but the men's status in society is measured by job status, money and power (14). The representation of the 'perfect body' in media and the overemphasis on hypersexuality cause the negative representation and degradation of elderly women (15). In this context, Julia Twigg's argument seems to be appropriate as she opines that "we are not judged by how old we are, but how young we are not" (Twigg 61). In the West, the body holds a different significance for the identity of ageing women which is not the same in Asian countries where social ageing often predominates biological ageing. In India, "a young widow is considered as socially old and therefore is not supposed to have any desires and is supposed to live a life of austerity, limited mobility etc." (Ahmed-Ghosh 15). A worldwide notion of separating the body from the mind has been initiated to understand the concern of ageing identity. Gerontologists have popularised the terms like 'healthy ageing' and 'successful ageing' to understand the importance of the mind in the denial of bodily age-related changes (Bouson 20). However, in India, when a young body is even closely associated with an aging mind then the boundary of chronological age gets shattered.

The complex and shifting multi-layered ageing identities are traditionally built in India where the social roles dominate the individual's identity. The aged women are even further divided by the multiplicity of class, caste, ethnicity and religion. The ageing experiences and concerns of the lower-class Muslim women, the upper-class Hindu Brahmin women, prostitutes or sweeper-women are never the same. Instead of maintaining the silence about the varied ageing identity, each category of the multi-layered ageing group needs to be studied in future research of feminist studies. The issues of the aged women in India even become far more problematic than in the west because of the discrimination on the basis of gender, class and caste inside the rigid patriarchal system. Though women contribute the maximum household work and caring work even throughout their old age, they remain "the poorest of the poor" inside the patriarchal system (Desai 60; Ahmed-Ghosh 22).

Several studies on ageing women in India and their group-based social ostracism have proved how the condition of ageing women in India is still vulnerable with poor health condition, disability, chronic illness, illiteracy, minimum skills, dependency for livelihood,

need for shelter and care of the family. The economic condition of older women can be enhanced through various social and legal initiatives like providing them proper education, employment and property rights. The status and the value of the aged women in society will be better when we will revive our traditional values like taking care of parents, start practising equal division of labour within the family and simultaneously take ourselves far away from the evil and discriminatory practices like female infanticide, the demand of dowry, female foeticide, domestic violence, and sati. The mainstream feminist writers in India need to highlight these issues which are very well connected to the deprived condition of elderly women in India. Future feminist research in the area should address the multilayered identity crisis in aged women and their marginalised status in society to break the taboo regarding age-shaming. This article collates and considers the different perspectives of feminists and gerontologists from both Indian and western traditions. However, the study does not address the risk of biasness of secondary sources. The article covers a wide area including the problem of a broad category like ageing women in India which renders it difficult to include an in-depth study of the ageing identities of different marginalised groups like ageing prostitutes, ageing and young widows, ageing housewives. The study highlights the possible areas of concern which need further research by summing up the available body of literature on the topic and projects the research gap for future researchers to explore.

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Food and Gender: The Circuit of Culture as a Generative Tool of Contemporary Analysis

Priyadarshini S
Research Scholar
Department of English
Vel Tech Rangarajan Dr. Sagunthala R&D Institute of Science and Technology
Avadi (Chennai), India
priyadarshinisathya77@gmail.com

Dr. M.R. Bindu
Research Supervisor,
Professor and Head, Department of English,
Vel Tech Rangarajan Dr. Sagunthala R&D Institute of Science and Technology
Avadi (Chennai), India
hodenglish@veltech.edu.in

Abstract

The Circuit of Culture is a cultural framework or paradigm. While studying a cultural text, all five components, such as Representation, Identity, Production, Consumption, and Regulation, must be addressed. This tool investigates the several modes and interactions used to construct and establish the film industry's role as a commodity that meets the demands and requirements of its audience. The cultural circuit may assist in gaining a better understanding of how the general audience perceives film as a product. This article uses the Circuit of Culture to understand better film production and the representation of food and gender. Several modalities and interrelations are employed to develop and perpetuate the film industry's role as a commodity that fits the audience's needs. Ritesh Batra's The Lunchbox*, Karthick Saragur's* Bheemasena Nalamaharaja*, and Jeo Baby's* The Great Indian Kitchen *are used to investigate the Circuit of Culture and its implementation. These films use the five components of the Circuit of Culture to comprehend the value of cultural research.*
Keywords: Food, Gender, Culture, Identity, Film

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Introduction

Literature is a corpus of literary works. It can serve social, psychological, spiritual, or political purposes and inform and entertain (Nair 1). Literature and film are two different but equally exceptional art forms. The film overtook literature as the 18th and 19th centuries' most popular form of expression. Despite differences, both can transport readers or viewers to another realm. While literature takes readers on a journey of the imagination far from the real world, films give such an imagined world to the audience and do not place much pressure on their minds to venture there. They see the film through the filmmaker's vision. Visualizing the

entire scene on the screen, which enables the spectator to identify with the moment more closely, is one of the film's key strengths that writing lacks.

Culture is a network of intricate meanings. The most efficient mechanism for propagating these meanings is contemporary media. Stuart Hall portrays them as being communicated through language as a representative system in its operation. He explains the Circuit of Culture model to understand this process. In the late 1990s, British cultural theorists developed the Circuit of Culture as a tool for artistic study. The Circuit highlights the interconnected articulations of the five components as moments of production, representation, consumption, regulation, and identity. This Circuit examines the mechanisms and interactions used to develop and establish the film industry's purpose as a commodity to meet the audience's demands and requirements. The film is essential in informing and educating the public about the country's cultural aspects. The circuit serves to understand how cinema performs as a product that people consume. This article focuses on using circuits of culture in the media sector to understand better the industry and the portrayal of food and women. The five elements of the Circuit of Culture are applied in the film to understand the significance of cultural study (Arvind 38). Ritesh Batra's *The Lunchbox*, Karthik Saragur's *Bheemasena Nalamaharaja*, and Jeo Baby's *The Great Indian Kitchen* are used to investigate the Circuit of Culture and its implementation.

Food and Gender

Gender studies examine gender identity and representation. Food studies are significant nowadays. It has more to do with gender and its functions. Eating is an essential human activity vital for life and intricately linked to social interaction. The recent psychoanalytic theory claims that eating habits are fundamental to self-identification and play a crucial role in determining family, class, and ethnic identity. Food studies are an emerging multidisciplinary area that examines the complex interactions between food, culture, and society. Food is frequently employed as a metaphor in literature because it is a well-known, universal substance that can be recognized and understood when used as a representation (Whitt 9). The presence of food in novels, poetry, theatre, and literary essays is about more than a realistic portrayal of everyday human experience. Food serves as a second layer of indication in literary works, reflecting and complicating the words on the page (Counihan and Kaplan 1-3). Food and its representation in films provide an exciting backdrop for film studies.

> To begin with, food, has to play a star role, whether the leading characters are cooks (professional or domestic) or not. This means that often the camera will focus in on food preparation and presentation so that in closeups or panning shots, food fills the screen. The restaurant kitchen, the dining room and/or kitchen of a home, tables within a restaurant, a shop in which food is made and/or sold, will usually be central settings. And the film's narrative line will consistently depict characters negotiating questions of identity, power, culture, class, spirituality, or relationship through food. (Civelek 6)

Since food representations predate literacy, examining food in films affords us new

ways to explore how movies shape our perception of the world and its role. Food symbolizes compassion that nourishes bodies and souls; hence, cooking and preparing food to demonstrate devotion to one's fellow beings requires effort and time in the kitchen. Counihan studies food symbolisms in films that employ visual mediation to represent gender themes and stresses the capacity of food symbolism to challenge and reconsider gender conventions, roles, and behaviors. (Civelek 8)

The film plays a significant role in informing and educating the mass regarding the cultural aspects of society. *Bheemasena Nalamaharaja* is an Indian Kannada language film directed by Karthik Saragur. This film uses food as its essential foundation for the narrative. It is like a multiple-course meal filled with various dishes that range in assorted flavors; this story has a lot of characters and twists that add extra layers to the story (Suresh). *The Lunchbox* is an Indian Hindi film written and directed by Ritesh Batra. Ila's tiffin, prepared for her husband, is mistakenly delivered to Saajan Fernandes owing to an unusual tiffin carrier service mistake. The two establish a unique bond swiftly (Simbasible). *The Great Indian Kitchen* is an Indian Malayalam film directed by Jeo Baby. In the movie, Nimisha Sajayan plays a newlywed who tries to live up to her husband Suraj Venjaramood's and his family's expectations as a subservient wife and how she finally relieves herself (George).

Theorizing Circuit of Culture in select Films

The Circuit contains five elements: Representation, Identity, Production, Consumption, and Regulation. All components are intricately connected.

Representation

Signals, modes, and discourses provide meaning to an audience, user, or co-communicator. It helps interpret events in many ways. Scenes and characters help to convey the message. The film promotes women's power and contribution. In a patriarchal society, women are submissive, timid, and dependent. (Arvind 38)

Women are both autonomous and dependent in *Bheemasena Nalamaharaja*. The notion of food plays a considerable influence. Her father often mistreats the heroine. He never permits her to consume extra food as she is obese. They believe being thin is healthy and desirable and often criticize overweight people. Culture depicts obesity as a risk factor for a variety of health problems. The film depicts the heroine's father as more concerned that his daughter, like her mother, should not suffer from health problems due to her weight. Vedavalli, the female protagonist, encourages hero Latthesh to establish his food truck. She is self-sufficient and capable of making decisions and dealing with societal issues.

> At this young age, you have high BP, diabetes, and heart problem. And your daughter is quite plump compared to others of her age. If this continues, she might also get all these diseases at a young age. She could also contract diseases at a young age. It would be wise to control from now. (Bheemasena 01:52:15 – 01:52:35)

The Lunchbox depicts the dissolution of marriage, which is considered taboo in today's Culture. When Ila discovers that her husband is having an adulterous affair and that

her heart belongs to another character, Saajan Fernandes, she attempts to flee from her husband. This film aims to deconstruct patriarchy and emphasize the importance of women's confidence in facing adversities. *The Great Indian Kitchen* depicts the life of married women in India. This movie represents the role of the kitchen and its role in the life of married women. The archaic customs related to menstruation also represent how this contemporary age still refuses to unfollow certain beliefs. During menstruation, women are not allowed in the kitchen. They ought to lie on the ground or on a simple surface to clean. The clothes are washed separately from other things. Everything the women use over seven days should be purified. Finally, how the heroine evolves as an independent dance teacher and walks out of her family life is represented.

> Wash everything that you have used, including the spread, in running water. Put your washed clothes away from those of others. Burn the sanitary pads, do not leave them lying around. Do not evoke the wrath of the snake god. After seven days, purify everything you used with holy water. (Great 01:16:37 – 01:16:53)

Identity

Films play a significant role in the communication process by presenting, refining, and renegotiating. Every actor strives to connect with the audience, and the audience seeks to see themselves mirrored in the actors. This will assist the viewer in associating with the character in the film (Arvind 39). *Bheemasena Nalamaharaja includes the modern fad of food trucks*. It is about how Vedavalli encourages Lattesha to be self-sufficient in his job.

> The third part of the drama has begun, BHEEMASENA NALAMAHARAJA. Here are the keys. I want you to serve thousands of people. Thousands of people in this city crave good, tasty food, you know. You have to go to them and satisfy their hunger. And that is why this truck is called Bheemasena. (Bheemasena 00:48:54 – 00:49:13)

The primary idea conveyed in *The Lunchbox* is that a woman should be self-sufficient whether she is employed or not. It has to do with a person's mental emancipation. Ila, an ideal housewife, makes choices independently. In *The Great Indian Kitchen*, the Protagonist has her identity in dancing. When she could not oversee certain situations as a wife, she returned to her identity as a dance teacher. It portrays that women should no longer be enslaved and chained in their kitchens. Instead, they should seek their own identity.

> Women should not see this supreme court order as something concerning just temple entry. It is the declaration of our freedom. The declaration that we are slaves to nobody. They hope they can chain women forever under their control in the house and kitchen. (Great 01:22:40 – 01:22:58)

Production

The films provide meaning to the audience through their content, action, music, signs, and symbols. The notion emphasized in the movie might sometimes assist adoption while challenging overall values and assumptions. Food is a prominent symbol throughout the plot

(Arvind 39).

The selfless love between mother and daughter, husband and wife, is depicted in *Bheemasena Nalamaharaja*. Vedavalli has been craving love since she lost her mother, and when Latthesh provides her food with the same care, she desires him to be a part of her life.

> On the other side of this round Earth, not very far from here, she had mother's food hour after hour, freshly churned butter, the sweet sizzling sound of the mouth-watering dosa, chunks of butter melting on the hot dosa, with the aromatic chutney powder on it. Every morsel feels like a step closer to heaven. (Bheemasena 00:13:14 – 00:13:42)

It is portrayed in *The Lunchbox* that the shortest route to a man's heart is through his stomach, so Ila devotes all her love to cook for her husband, but it inadvertently reaches another man and new love blossoms with food as a catalyst.

> Thank you for sending back an empty lunch box. I made that food for my husband. And when it came back empty. I thought he would say something to me. For a few hours, I thought the way to the heart is really through the stomach. In return to those hours, I am sending you Paneer, my husband's favorite. (Lunchbox 00:21:49 – 00:22:11)

Certain foods trigger a variety of emotions and memories. Food inspires memories of numerous individuals in *Bheemasena Nalamaharaja*, and hero Latthesh tries to bring back the memory of Vedavalli through food when she has completely lost consciousness.

> Our Father was a great cook too. He used to cook well, you know. He knew he would be crucified the next morning, yet he cooked. That is known as the last supper. I will tell you a secret, child. Cooking has the power to face any obstacle. (Bheemasena 01:15:17 – 01:15:35)

Food rekindles memories of Saajan's late wife in *The Lunchbox*. Ila also tries hard to resurrect her husband's recollections of her through the cuisine she serves. Before the emergence of vaccination, the globe utilized natural food to defend itself during pandemics. So, Food is an excellent remedy for various issues in everyday life. Vedavalli was involved in an accident in *Bheemasena Nalamaharaja* and lost her senses entirely. As a result, Latthesh used food as therapy. Food is used as medicine here, not just for bodily healing but also emotional well-being. Lattesha attempted to recreate all the recipes he fed her while they were in love. In the end, he was successful. In *The Lunchbox*, Ila, a housewife, finds happiness and fulfillment in cooking despite her miserable marriage. As a result, eating works as therapy in this case. So, the general message here is that food and love can work wonders in our lives.

> Dear Ila, your grandmother's recipe was very good. Even better than my favorite aubergines. Yesterday even I found something from many years ago. I found old TV shows that my wife used to record. You must have been a child when they played on TV, or not even born yet. My wife used to love them. I do not know why I wanted to see them. I watched them for hours. I went through them show by show, episode by episode. And then finally, after staying up all night, I realized what it was that I was looking for. (Lunchbox 00:47:54 – 00:48:41)

In *The Great Indian Kitchen*, the newlyweds were given milk and bananas shortly after the wedding. In southern India, this is a pervasive cultural tradition. When newlyweds

visit relatives, eat, and receive blessings and well wishes, they produce artistic representations. Tapioca Biriyani (Kappa Biriyani), a Keralan delicacy, was served. Idiyappam, Puttu, Aval, Tapioca Biriyani, and other dishes reflect Keralan culture through food. "Have some Tapioca Biriyani. Do you eat beef?" (00:13:31 – 00:13:34). We have recently forgotten how to cook traditionally with elements like firewood and grindstone. This film shows how men coerce women to use grindstone and firewood. "Did you cook the rice in the cooker? Oh. Cook the rice on the fire." (00:26:58 – 00:27:03). When spectators view these scenes, they know about the traditional Indian cooking customs.

The Great Indian Kitchen portrays the belief that only women were born with the ability to cook persists in many households. Men carry out daily hobbies, such as reading newspapers, using mobile phones, practicing yoga, etc. In contrast, women spend their entire day in the kitchen taking care of the family and have no time for their interests. Only women eat the leftovers, and men prefer flatbreads (Chappati) since they are so nutritious. When the heroine serves food cooked in a cooker, she is encouraged not to employ quick cooking methods but to stick to the traditional firewood method. She is not even allowed to wash all her clothes in the washing machine, and the male prefers them to wash using their hands. "If you wash in the machine… won't the clothes wear out fast? Don't wash mine in that." (00:37:38 – 00:37:44). The movie shows how women have historically only been considered a commodity and not living beings. Males in the community are not prepared to hear their problems and offer solutions; instead, they treat them like slaves and benefit from them. They were not allowed to work and treat women as though they were born only to serve their families and care for their children.

> We decided not to apply. My wife is a post-graduate. She wished to work. But I listened to my dad. Because of that, all the children are in very good positions. Having women at home is very auspicious for the family. (Great 01:03:45 – 01:04:03)

Consumption

The film's message should not aggressively confront the prevailing culture. The delivery of dialogue, action words and lyrics, music, and other factors are part of the audience's consuming pattern (Arvind 39). Bheemasena Nalamaharaja emphasizes that women deserve respect and dignity. This movie investigates the power of food to stir up feelings of affection. Foods have the potential to heal both our minds and our hearts. As a result, the Food Truck idea provided them with identity and respect in the film.

> "alt, sour, sweet, bitter, pungent, and astringent. All six tastes are in this. Anyone can cook using these. But you have a special ingredient with you. And that is love. I looked for it everywhere but did not find it. You have it in you in abundance. (Bheemasena 00:45:27 – 00:45:46)

The theme of self-liberation is well-paced in *The Lunchbox*, especially in the female protagonist Ila and how she approaches her life as a strong woman. The audience should understand that the contemporary age is the time for women to establish themselves as autonomous, sensible, dynamic, and challenging members of society. *The Great Indian Kitchen* depicts the Sabarimala dispute in Kerala. In the Indian state of Kerala's

Pathanamthitta District, there is a Shasta temple called Sabarimala. Shasta is a celibate god; thus, traditionally, women and girls of reproductive age were not allowed to attend worship there. According to the Supreme Court, menstruation is not impure, and the practice of segregating women is unconstitutional. Women should not view this Supreme Court decision as only limiting temple entry. There is no inherent purpose for women to spend their entire lives confined to the home and the kitchen.

> What is this? You sleep on a bed? Hasn't anyone told you not to sleep on a bed? You should only sleep on something that can be washed. Can't you move to a relative's place or to the outhouse? (Great 01:13:45 – 01:13:55)

Regulation

The factors that limit the creation, distribution, and consumption of films and other media are censorship. In these films, the censor board plays a vital role in controlling offensive language, music, or anything that disrespects any part of society (Arvind 39).

Conclusion

Films significantly influence society and are a form of mass media. While some contend that movies should allow viewers to escape their worlds for two hours in a darkened theatre, others believe that by seeing stories relevant to modern life, audiences can be more really and deeply involved. These films portray how modern society perceives gender and food. It uses food to illustrate the characters' roles and explores food's symbolism. The film, as a commodity, enters the market and influences the consumer with content, message, and concept that caters to the audience's demands. The audience's statement, appreciation, and profit made by the films illustrate how the five aspects are interrelated to a significant level to reach and connect the masses. As a result, the Circuit of Culture is a circular process and a powerful tool for assessing current social and cultural activities.

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Men and the Fabrication of Phallocentrism in Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*

Anshu Kiran
Research Scholar
Department of English
Chandigarh University
Gharuan, Mohali (Punjab) India
kirananshu09@gmail.com

Dr. Smarika Pareek
Associate Professor
Department of English
Chandigarh University
Gharuan, Mohali (Punjab) India
pareeksmarika@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper aims to deliberate the repercussions of gender stereotypes on men and how Phallocentrism plays a vivacious role in constructing a base ideology for men which encourages the legitimacy of the patriarchal structure. This advocacy of hegemonic masculinity sets out men's relationship with women and with other men and sustains the way in which men are hierarchized. Some references will be illustrated from Shyam Selvadurai's text Funny Boy *to navigate and discuss the effects of internalization of masculinity, identity enactments, culture, gender norms, and society, on half of our population. Emphasis will be put on how in any culture Dichotomy is just a potent metaphor and not a natural state. Followed by the references, and some germane elucidations from Helen Cixous and her views about Phallocentrism, this article will further discuss the endorsement of performance stress on Indian men as a result of social conditioning, privilege, and power.*
Keywords: Masculinity, Patriarchy, Men, Phallocentrism, Gender, Performance

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Introduction

> I shall speak about women's writing: about what it will do. Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies-for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. A Woman must put herself into the text-as into the world and into history-by her own movement. (Cixous 875)

Hélène Cixous is a professor, French feminist author, poet, dramatist, philosopher, literary critic, and rhetorician who was born on June 5, 1937, in Oran, Algeria as a Jewish-Algerian-French. She has proved via her publications that both philosophy and literature are fields that support patriarchal dominance, and this has contributed significantly to her status as a feminist literary theorist. Derridean deconstruction had an impact on her writing. She tries to discover writing which is fluid, rebellious, and outside of binary systems. In addition, Cixous has authored plays and novels. She has a considerable amount of literature published that

including 23 volumes of poetry, 6 essay books, 5 plays, and countless important articles. Her work is frequently regarded as deconstructive, and she co-published Voiles with Jacques Derrida. Derrida described her as the best living writer in the French language when he introduced her Wellek Lecture, which was later released as *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing.*

Cixous is regarded as one of the founders of poststructuralist feminist theory, together with Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray. Cixous started writing about the connection between language and sexuality in the 1970s, she agrees with other poststructuralist feminist theorists that how we communicate in society has a direct impact on our sexuality. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen translated Cixous' 1975 feminist essay *Le Rire de la Méduse* from its original French into English as *The Laugh of the Medusa* in 1976. In the field of feminist literary theory, this work has a special position as a groundbreaking essay that established what Cixous called Écriture féminine, a specific form of writing for women and by women. She is the best example of the Écriture féminine, who used writing to teach women how to break free from patriarchy.

"I write this as a woman, toward women. When I say 'woman, 'I'm speaking of woman in her inevitable struggle against conventional man; and of a universal woman subject who must bring women to their senses and to their meaning in history" (Cixous 875). It is evident that Cixous writes about women but this paper seeks to apply Phallocentrism in a distinctive way. In a way, which describes how men are subjugated and marginalized because of patriarchy. Subsequently, the core concepts of Phallocentrism will be discussed. In order to demonstrate the real motivation for Cixous' creation of a novel concept of Phallocentrism, her intellectual environment is briefly described in the first section. Following is a discussion of poststructuralism, the intellectual movement to which Cixous belonged. Specifically, Freud's assertions on the penis envy theory. The notion of Phallocentrism, which may be viewed as one of the driving forces behind Cixous' writings, is given the majority of focus. In order to comprehend this phrase more fully, the idea of logocentrism is also described. Logocentrism merits mentioning at this point since it may be considered a cornerstone of the Phallocentrism idea.

The impacts of internalizing masculinity, identity enactments, culture, gender norms, and society on half of our population are covered in the second section, which also applies Phallocentrism to the novel *Funny Boy*. Emphasis will be placed on the fact that dichotomy is only a powerful metaphor and not a natural condition in any civilization. The study will continue to address the endorsement of performance stress on Indian males as a result of societal conditioning, privilege, and power after the references and some pertinent clarifications. We will also examine how the female body and sexuality fit within this setting. This excursion is quite fascinating since it's essential for comprehending her idea. In addition, we attempt to demonstrate if Phallocentric elements are present in the novel *Funny Boy*. The key points of this essay are summarised in the conclusion.

Origin

In psychoanalytic theory, the phallus serves as the supreme symbol of masculine power and, concurrently, of feminine lack. "Phallocentrism" is a term used primarily by feminist theorists to denote the pervasive privileging of the masculine within the

current system of signification. (Rine 2)

British psychologist Ernest Jones, a Freudian psychotherapist, used the term Phallocentrism in 1927 to express his opposition to Freud's thesis that female sexual identity is defined by the absence of the phallus, or, in other words, a sensation of castration. According to Jones, this theory robs women of any positive perception of their sexual organs and is the unconscious projection of male psychoanalysts' own neurotic anxieties about the female body. The first experience with sexual difference occurs during the phallic period of infant development. In this stage, the genitalia—specifically, the penis, which Freud confused with the phallus as a sign of power—figure prominently in the division between the sexes. Freud imagined the beginnings of female sexuality in terms of the masculine phallus, seeing the clitoris as a penis analogy.

"Unlike the theories of Freud, Lacan's Oedipal crisis culminates with entry into the symbolic, the external realm of language and culture, where the child learns to perceive the world in terms of sameness and difference" (Rine 2). On the other hand, Freud's father was a real one, while Lacan's father is symbolic, and it is this representational father who intercedes between both the mother and her child, producing a split between the subject's conscious and unconscious. Though Phallocentrism predominantly and overtly hinders female subjectivity, Cixous contends that a strongly male-centered worldview harms both sexes. Cixous compares Phallocentrism to a machine and says that it is harmful to both men and women, albeit in different ways. Women are subjected to and defined by lack inside the phallocratic system, while males are given the absurd and onerous fate of just being degraded to a solitary idol with clay balls. The tight division of masculinity and femininity obliterates the presence of both sexes within each human, as Cixous asserts. Cixous proposes the idea of écriture féminine, a form of expression that gives voice to the suppressed feminine, as a strategy for combating phallocentric discourse.

Like Cixous, Luce Irigaray's philosophy calls for a reinterpretation of sexual difference, one unbound by phallocentric hierarchies. Irigaray's first published works, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985) and *This Sex Which is Not One* (1985) serve as incisive and extensive critiques of phallocentric bias throughout Western thought. (Rine 3)

In her later works, she concentrated on developing a new style of interaction between the sexes, one that encourages variation without hierarchy or appropriation. Irigaray, who adheres to the psychoanalytic tradition, criticizes Freud and Lacan's Phallocentrism and claims that their theories are based on a conventional hierarchy of the senses that prioritizes visibility. Compared to the large penis, the less noticeable female genitalia is seen as being absent or lacking.

Application

The Sri Lankan-Canadian novelist Shyam Selvadurai has significantly contributed to the increasing visibility of homosexuality in the cultural domain of contemporary Sri Lanka, making way for positive configurations of same-sex love in the public imagination and his novel *Funny Boy* (1995) is now one of the best known contemporary queer classics. (Sarmah 1488)

Funny Boy criticizes Sri Lankan society's treatment of LGBT sexualities, genders, and races. Arjie explores his passage from infancy to adolescence by narrating memories,

experiences, and the genesis of his queer sexuality in post-colonial Sri Lanka. In his memories, Arjie is in “exile" due to his "funny" identity, which separates him from "normative" discourses. Arjie's romantic "recollections" of a fractured past are undercut by his depiction of escalating Sinhalese and Tamil tensions, which led to the symbolic and literal collapse of his "home" and his deportation from Sri Lanka. “The novel includes six chapters/stories recounting the life of Arjie before his family's relocation to Canada following the 1983 riots that presented a direct physical threat to the lives of the Tamil minority”(Sarmah 1489). The first few chapters are a nostalgic look back at Arjie's childhood, recalling the numerous occurrences that introduce the entire family and the protagonist, Arjie. Towards the end of the book, Arjie comes into his own sexuality and the political unrest in the country becomes a central theme.

> The Six chapters are titled—*Pigs Can't Fly*; *Radha Aunty*; *See No Evil, Hear No Evil; Small Choices*; *The Best School of All;* and *Riot Journal: An Epilogue*. The first chapters titled “*Pigs Can't Fly*” and “*Radha Aunty*,” helps to shape Arjie's understanding of love, relationships, and sexuality. (Selvadurai 53)

When the book begins, Arjie is roughly seven years old. The journal entries from the historical communal clashes in Sri Lanka are included in the last chapter, *Riot Journal: An Epilogue*. The Tamil/Sinhalese conflict is shown as a never-ending cycle of events, with the 1983 riots serving as the turning point for both Arjie's story and his relationship with his Sinhalese partner Shehan. Provoked by a Tamil rebellion against the government's strategy to formally recognize Sinhala as the official language of Sri Lanka, mass murders of Tamils were conducted by “some Sinhalese people” (Selvadurai 59) in 1958, in which Arjie's great-grandfather did die, pursued by the genocides of 1971, 1977, 1981, and the eruption of civil war in 1983.

Themes of queerness, homosexuality, ethnicity and postcolonialism have been explored throughout the novel. The term Gender usually refers to social or cultural distinctions and roles associated with a person's biological sex. Earlier gender was associated more with sexuality but “Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick coined the term “homosocial” to oppose “homosexual,” describing nonsexual same sex relations” (Sarmah 1489). In highly patriarchal societies with the development of a gender variant category is totally unacceptable. It is either treated as a defect or transvestism that needs to be corrected

Both in theory and fiction, the formation of identities is flexible. In other words, because different aspects are juxtaposed and intertwined, it is hard to investigate postcolonial, cultural, and queer identities as independent elements in any work. The character's identity development in the book *Funny Boy* is influenced by a variety of axes of difference, such as homosexual and heterosexual, Tamil and Sinhalese, downward and upward mobility, and imperial subject and postcolonial agent. However, in order to facilitate analysis, the comparison of Funny Boy and the theory of Phallocentism has been into many sections: Postcolonial Identity, Tamil Culture, and Queer identities.

Postcolonial Identity

“Diasporas have come to represent more than the exile and persecution of Jewish and Greek communities. The term 'diaspora' stems from an ancient Greek term that is associated with scattering and dispersal” (Narayanamoorthy 5). International Tamil diaspora creation

and recognition in recent decades have had perhaps the largest impact on the concept of Tamil identity, especially due to Sri Lankan Tamils fleeing that country during its civil war (1983-2009).

Arjie, the protagonist, is a child within the homosexual and female realms, and the novel's themes of nationalism and patriarchy signify an 'imitation of colonial tyranny' against them. Throughout the novel, it is signified that in this culture, Arjie is under the thumb of both his father and the state. Thus, *Funny Boy* ends up being about the struggle of an oppressed child in the heteronormative world. The game of Bride-Bride that all of the cousins play in the backyard at family get-togethers is a stunning illustration explained by Gayatri Gopinath as "non-performativity of masculinity" (Gayatri 140). Talking about queer identity, Arjie is accused of having a queer identity in the most obvious manner possible by his cousin Tanuja. She says, "But he's not even a girl. A bride is a girl, not a boy" (Selvadurai 66). He is called *Faggot, Pansy, and Funny One* and this displays Arjie's young age as a victim of a potentially queer phobic discourse, which includes slurs and other degrading treatment. "It is interesting to note that when his female cousin Meena joins the young boys to play cricket, she never feels uninvited, nor is she banned from partaking in the sphere of men" (Narayanamoorthy 19). Because Arjie is a 'youngster from Sri Lanka' who is supposed to behave like a man, he is subject to societal bias.

Tamil Culture and Queer Identity

An ethnic group from South India has spawned actions to preserve and safeguard their language, which in turn helps them maintain their identity. The primary goal of this investigation is to identify the characters' "Tamil-ness" and the ensuing linguistic crisis in *Funny Boy*. Selvadurai's work is set in Sri Lanka, where ethnic conflict against the Tamil people defines their identity and their affinity with the language.

Funny Boy evidences an ethnic divide between the Sinhalese and the Tamils that translates directly into a linguistic divide as ethnic identity is based on the language of each community. The novel takes place against a backdrop of a war between the communities and it is this strife that eventually leads to a subordinate position accorded to the Tamils and their language. The postcolonial nation of Sri Lanka, enveloped in its nationalistic fervor, opted for Sinhalese as the national language, and Tamil was therefore seen as a threat to the existence of the Sinhala community and language. (Narayanamoorthy 34)

She was deported to Sri Lanka's Jaffna district because of her relationship with a Sinhalese man, Radha Aunty. As a result of this, her return to Colombo is described in the novel as a scene of violence against Tamils. "You'll never guess what! Radha Aunty's train was attacked. Because there was trouble in Jaffna. People attacked the Tamils on the train. Radha Aunty was hurt and everything" (Selvadurai 86). Even though they 'camouflage' themselves to sound and act like their Sinhalese peers, all of the characters in the narrative have an intrinsic yearning to preserve their Tamil identity. Arjie has aspirations that are different from the heteronormative mindsets of their communities and could be labeled 'queer,' according to the analysis conducted. The same attitude and rigid institutions that form their communities must be overcome if he is to comprehend and appreciate queerness.

The queerness in *Funny Boy* and the queer identity of Arjie himself are exemplified by the wider segregation of gender spaces in the novel. The Sri Lankan postcolonial

heteronormative setting disallows the idea of a fluid nature of gender and rather places it in two distinct and rigid categories of 'male' and 'female'. The idea that Arjie does not belong to either of these gendered spaces is apparent from the first chapter "Pigs can't fly" and is central to his different and 'Othered' identity in the narrative. (Narayanamoorthy 46)

During the day, the protagonist often played 'Bride-Bride' with his female cousins, while his male cousins played cricket in the garden of their home as children. Because of this, the conventional masculine and feminine spaces are taken over by the geographic and physical separation of gender. Cricket is played in a male-dominated backyard, where girls are essentially prohibited from entering. In the case of young boys, however, the shuttling of areas by an unsaid heteronormative order intensifies the gendering. Queer-phobic society lays significant importance on masculinity and its relationship to national identity, which dictates the identity of individuals. At a young age, Arjie is aware of the gendered zones in his environment.

Conclusion

Funny Boy tells the story of a young boy's coming of age as he struggles to come to grips with his sexual orientation in a country torn apart by ethnic tensions. The story examines how social, cultural, and political conventions affect the lives of the protagonists. Arjie immediately becomes dissatisfied with the traditional gender norms she is forced to conform to as a child. In addition, because he is a representative of the Tamil ethnic group, he is considered less important. He eventually learns how to filter his way through these societal conceptions and establish an entirely new identity for himself as the narrative goes on. Transgressing social norms and rejecting prejudiced morality is how he comes to accept his homosexuality and live his life as it should be.

The work explores the various connections between the private and public, personal and political, through these motifs. Arjie's sexual orientation has a direct impact on his sense of alienation at school. Also, the fact that he is gay strongly influences how he feels about his family and how he fits in with them. His citizenship status is also under question due to his Tamil heritage. In the case of Arjie, the concept of home becomes increasingly difficult to define when his whole family is necessitated to depart their homeland behind and adopt a different country Canada. In the end, Funny Boy explores the various ways in which a person's cultural, ethnic, and gender identity can influence their sense of being part of a community or country. A figure who has experienced various levels of exile, both within and beyond his own country, is Funny Boy's way of exploring the arbitrary and fragile links that hold people and society together. It is a quest for identity and we can sum up by saying that Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* novel provided examples of how the internalization of masculinity, identity enactment, cultural norms, and society affects half of our population, as depicted in the above examples and the protagonist Arjie was able to maintain his uniqueness despite the numerous attempts by his father, uncles, and aunts to instill the Phallocentrism concept in him. Despite being repeatedly pinned down, he was able to break free and flee.

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In Search of Self-fulfillment: A Study of Anita Rau Badami's *Tamarind Mem* and Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit you: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*

Nidhi
Research Scholar
Department of English
Chandigarh University
Gharuan, Mohali (Punjab) India
nidhinrwl@gmail.com

Dr. Nipun Chaudhary
Associate Professor
Department of English
Chandigarh University
Gharuan, Mohali (Punjab) India
nipun.e10984@cumail.in

Abstract

Badami and Kandasamy have displayed their female protagonists' decisive search for self-fulfillment in a socio-cultural setting where pursuing identity has frequently remained out of reach for women. Though controlled and suffocated in an oppressive and unhappy marriage, the women in the selected novels eventually surpass customary limitations to develop their identity. The major goal of this study is to examine the main characters in light of Elaine Showalter's feminist theory to depict the search for self-fulfillment. Kandasamy in her novel gives an account of an unhappy husband-wife relationship in which a nameless heroine, endures physical, emotional, and mental anguish at the hands of her husband before fleeing to her parent's house and following her desire to become a writer. While Badami explores the feminine world through Saroja, the novel reveals the subjection and struggle for freedom, who is a victim of conventional ideals. Badami claims that her goal is to give voice to voiceless women. The paper aims to examine the women's experiences in the selected texts who display unyielding strength and capability in rejecting the submissive picture of the feminine mystique to fully realize their capabilities and individuality.
Keywords: Feminism, Self-Fulfillment, Individuality, Patriarchy, Submission, Oppression

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Introduction

The present paper concentrates on the different experiences of women in Badami's *Tamarind Mem* and Kandasamy's *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* who demonstrate unrelenting capacity and ability in shunning the subservient portrayal of the feminine mystique to recognize their abilities and distinctiveness in the light of feminist

literary concepts. In feminist debate, the concept of 'gender' is dynamic; we frequently move between both the concepts of gender and sex. Consequently, gender becomes a complementary word for sex. However, the issue is, are they similar things? Even if we fail to recognise it, Beauvoir's statement, "One isn't born as a woman, rather become" (Beauvoir 295) has long established the distinction. As a result, comprehending gender needs a theoretical analysis of societal structure. Society not only determines our personalities and behaviours but also how our bodies seem to others.

Gender was established as an essential category of literary criticism by Elaine Showalter. Gender theory, which investigates both men and women as socially constructed based on their biological distinctions, offers numerous benefits, according to her, including an opportunity for the subject of masculine and feminine theory. In *Towards a Feminist Poetics*, Showalter traces the history of women's literature into three phases: feminine, feminist, and female. She has been frequently quoted as encouraging women to establish their ideologies to overcome male dominance. Her three-stage categorisation of female authors seeks to dissect women's position in contemporary society. In a traditional society, women were restrained by culture and norms. Female education and awareness, on the other hand, prompted women to consider what it meant to be a female in a traditional society. It sought to dismantle conventional gender norms and replace those with non-sexist alternatives. Showalter has shown how women's fiction has grown into a culture independent from dominating male literature. Formerly, male-centric writings flourished, with women's problems and achievements being neglected. Only the man was idealized or empathised with. In the third stage, "Women reject both imitation and protest – two forms of dependency – and turn instead to female experience as the source of an autonomous art, extending the feminist analysis of culture to the forms and techniques of literature" (Showalter 4).

This implies that in this phase they have adopted 'voice' as a tool and refuse to tolerate 'silence'. Without a question, India is shifting away from a male-dominated society, yet prejudice exists in rural and urban places, across all social classes. Both the novelists belong to the modern period but their writings depict a transition from the 'feminine' to 'female' phase.

Feminine Mystique

Placing women at home and confining them only indoors is related to the projection of a conventional woman in the feminine phase. In a misogynistic culture, women are often imprisoned at the house and are not permitted to leave. As a result, the author emphasises the perception of home and its function at this phase. According to Showalter, a conventional woman, such as Saroja's mother, keeps the traditional notion of female in her psyche; in reality, her feelings and memories are used to propagate patriarchal notions to future generations. This is how the authoritarian system operates and expands across society.

Patriarchy, as it is called, refers to the hegemonic masculinity over women and is a set of functions and ideas that depict women's subservience and individuality. Saroja's mother is portrayed as a meek, dutiful woman who must adhere to patriarchal traditions. Moreover, Saroja's viewpoint is also irrelevant to her father at her wedding because he must choose a husband for her. The identity of Saroja's mother is shaped by her roles as a wife, parent, and

grandparent. "Marriage is a crop that will last a thousand years" (Badami 180) she says, eloquently demonstrating her belief that marriage is a girl's ultimate destiny that will secure her future. When a daughter grows up, she is mainly treated as a domestic product that needs to be sold to the customers, and the deal gets sanctioned in the name of marriage.

Saroja, a completely dissatisfied soul, conveys this implicitly. Her family prioritised marriage above studies when she was young. "A woman without a husband is like sand without the river" (Badami 158) explains Saroja's mother. They consider education to be secondary. Saroja's parents held the orthodox notion, that marriage was a better option other than educating a girl child. Wollstonecraft rejected such an idea in her essay, where she advocates formal education for women which is utmost essential for their living, and spurned the idea of private education which doesn't allow women to reason but rather makes them the puppet of the norms of patriarchy.

Saroja, on the other hand, wants to pursue her education as her brother, who is permitted to move to England. Badami has exposed the gender bias which has stigmatized the gender roles both for men and women. Judith Butler's gender theory signifies that gender is performativity. Gender has no foundation or essence; it is all constructed socially. Hence, the body has no role to play in gender formation. Saroja is assigned the roles according to her gender exploring the cultural bias of the society. She is a victim of gender bias within her family. Despite her desire to continue her education, she is compelled to marry at the age of 16 to a much older person.

Rayaru her grandfather asks, "What is this I hear about attaching all kinds of degrees to your Sari pallu and not one marriageable degree?" (Badami 170) Saroja refutes his remarks. She answers him by mentioning the other married ladies in her house: "They are like cows. All they do is to have children and gossip" (Badami 171). Her mother's attitude to marriage often baffles Saroja "if she is unhappy why does she push me, her daughter, into the same jungle of sorrow?" (Badami 162). The thirst for parental love and care grows within Saroja. She tries to fill that gap with her new relationship – marriage.

Saroja, therefore, is shown as a dissatisfied woman trapped in her conventional and essential responsibilities as a mother and wife. Even, Vishwa, her learned husband, considers her to be the embodiment of a perfect woman. He feels that a woman's sole tasks and duties are cooking, cleaning, and child-rearing. The voidness in all other relationships follows her in their married life too. She craves her husband's love and attention but miserably fails. His detachment, silence, and displacement caused by his frequent transfers make Saroja's life totally rootless, "We are not to wander out of that little space he draws for us as if we are his designs, those precise lines with which he fills drafting sheets" (Badami 228).

Similarly, in Kandasamy's novel *When I Hit You*, the unnamed narrator receives the same treatment in her own house. Culture, as in a conventional societal structure, is used to rationalize gender disparities and injustice by using established cultural views on how women ought to be viewed. In her article, Dr. Varma raises sensitive and individualized issues. Gender norms have often been quoted from scriptures and folklore to demonstrate how females have sacrificed their aspirations since they are intended to sacrifice those, one must comprehend the ideology of sexual preference and link to it in a modern sense.

The mother of the narrator was more concerned about her marriage and how to make it successful. The parents of the narrator are true representatives of all parents of a daughter in a patriarchal society and the society puts so many questions regarding the failure of the marriage, no parent wants to confront such questions, so parents always try to mould their daughters and advise them to avoid any kind of confrontation with their husbands or in-laws. The narrator doesn't find any support or solace from her parents rather she was, directly and indirectly, pressurized by her parents to keep silent, wait and watch and put in extra effort to make her husband happy.

Marriage becomes a horrible nightmare for the narrator who is representing the plight of all women in abusive marriages under patriarchy. Her husband supported by patriarchal ideology crosses all limits. He used to beat her brutally and forces her to have sex whenever he demands. This was marital rape which he used as a weapon to control his wife. In *Women, Race and Class*, Angela Davis observes, "If the most violent punishments of men consisted in floggings and mutilations, women were flogged and mutilated, as well as raped" (Davis 7). Nothing can be more disgraceful, more insulting, and more painful for a woman who is raped by her husband and called whore, bitch, slut, etc. Greer discusses how the restrictions imposed on their imitations and sexual instincts reduce women to 'Female Eunuchs'.

Swagata Laxmi in her article asserts that, in a patriarchal society, rape has always been seen as a crime where the victim is considered to be more responsible than the perpetrator. This harsh reality has been portrayed by Shashi Deshpande in *The Binding Vine*, where Kalpana gets raped brutally and as a result, gets herself hospitalized at the stake of her life. Her mother Shakutai, instead of showing constant support and concern, considers her daughter to be responsible for such an unfortunate circumstance. Being a woman, she crosses her limitations that are constructed by society. Her mother blames her saying, "If you paint and flaunt yourself, do you think they'll leave you alone?" (Deshpande 67). Here the author underlines the counterfeited laxity and pervasive allegations that are highlighted after such wicked acts.

After marriage, she starts playing the role of a 'perfect wife'. Reverence, humility, and adherence have become her exclusive codes of conduct. She almost loses her identity as a separate being in her feminine role as a dutiful wife. She does everything the way her husband wants with no sign of disobedience. Thus, the husband's mission of turning the wife into an appendage to his life gradually gains momentum and he turns into absolute evil. She helplessly feels herself embodying the image of a self-effacing housewife. When her husband relegates her to a state of absolute self-denial, she nauseously muses, "I feel robbed of my identity. I'm no longer myself if another person can so easily claim to be me, pretend to be me, and assume my life while we live under the same roof" (Kandasamy 55). The husband's incessant violence eventually makes her choose the strategy of silence.

The authors emphasise two significant difficulties in this section. First, there's the issue of gender, in which a son is a source of pride and a daughter is a responsibility to the family. Second, as a woman, a mother is persuaded by patriarchal standards and becomes a part of them. This implies that women essentially become agents of patriarchy. Showalter characterised the feminine phase of women's writing as just copying the dominant male-dominated literary traditions. In this period, the two characters simply adhered to the dominant

societal set-up, in which masculine supremacy and women's female subordination were the unspoken rules. This claim has only been reinforced by the two protagonists' lives.

Changing Contours

In the feminine stage, women were equated with the house and stagnation, and they were submissive and subject to exploitation, whereas women are depicted to be dynamic and take an active role in the feminist stage. In this stage, the public outdoors contrasts with the home and being inside. Saroja longs to be free from a man who is apathetic about her needs and the burden of single parenting imposed by her husband's work responsibilities as a railway engineer. In his absence, she changed herself into a joyous person. She expresses her need for compassion from her marriage as well as her disappointment: "I, . . . am married to a man who has no feelings to spare for a wife. A dried-out lemon peel whose energies have already been squeezed out caring for a sick mother, worrying about his sisters…With my tamarind tongue never yielding a moment, I used my grandmother's strategy of words to ward off the pain of rejection . . ." (Badami 241).

Thus, Saroja's attempt "to seek selfhood or project subjectivity, or to work towards self-expression and freedom, has to work through the body and deconstruct received notions regarding a 'good' woman" (Jain 119). In an introspection after years back, with a conventionally trained mind, Saroja realizes her fault as a wife: "Dadda was not the husband I wanted him to be . . . The realization came too late…to say let us begin again, I have eaten my anger, swallowed my conceits. Too late to say to say come back" (Badami 243). Soon after Moorthy's death, she becomes free from the bounds that society thrust upon her years ago. This spurs in her the desire to choose a life of her own, a chance to design her life which she lost earlier: "But now I have rested enough, my feet are beginning to grow wheels... it is time for me to wander because I wish to" (Badami 265).

In the same way, Kandasamy's unnamed narrator, very soon, trying to fight back in her way, starts writing letters to imaginary lovers following the pattern of erasing the words before her husband comes back at lunch. Surprisingly, her "nothing except a housewife" (Kandasamy 3) reality does not manage to rob her of her words. Her sense of resistance makes her think, "With me, at this moment, I feel only the relish of rebellion, the comfort of long-forgotten words that now make me feel safe, feel loved" (Kandasamy 97). Despite her parents' constantly trying to convince her over the phone to stay with her husband, she plots her self-rescue mission with silent fury and a vehement resolution: "I will not allow myself to become the good wife, the good mother, the good-for-nothing woman that marriage aims to reduce me to. I will not allow my story to become a morality tale- about loose women, about lonely writer. . ." (Kandasamy 208).

Dr. Tanu Kashyap writes in her paper, "The novel takes us on a journey through structures of toxic masculinity and patriarchy, which allow such violence to be perpetuated". It overpowers a person's right to live with dignity. Thus, the plight of the protagonist is representative of the plight of all women suffering under the hegemony of patriarchy irrespective of any caste, class, or race. Her story has a realistic and universal appeal.

Women are seen to be dynamic and energetic in the feminist stage, which is

connected with revolting and questioning authoritarian ideology. In this phase, there is an awakening of the spirit in the female protagonists to challenge their unequal position in the family and the community. Throughout the story, these heroines embark on an inward odyssey and come to terms with their situation, deciding to conduct their lives in a way that allows them to feel liberated and not confined.

Self-Fulfillment

Showalter feels that the female stage relates to self-discovery and coming to terms with one's identity. It is here that women realize that they are different from males and that these distinctions allow them to develop and achieve self-awareness. Their physical distinctions would cause them to have unique experiences, feelings, and thoughts. Finally, Saroja recovers her strong character and decides to travel around India alone. She also states, "I need to stay in one place for a while – in my own place" (Badami 261). Your life must depend on you, not on anyone else, you need a place to be by yourself and do what you really love. This is what Saroja is looking for, she wants to be her boss. Saroja's final reflection, "I have rested enough" (Badami 265) refers to her submission during her whole life as a married woman, and that now she can do whatever she wants because, as she affirms, "I do not belong to anyone now" (Badami 266). She is determined to find her space in the male-dominated world. Badami deconstructs the age-old notions of womanhood through Saroja.

The protagonist of the novel *When I hit You,* takes refuge in words, she feels, "Words allow me to escape. Words give birth to another woman" (Kandasamy 241). Throughout the novel, she carries on a 'Herculean' struggle to both maintain and fashion her own identity which demonstrates that she has never lost her dignity and intense urge for self-assertion in the face of brutal dehumanization. In the end, boldly saying 'no' to the imposed image of a housewife, she embarks on a mission of leading the life of an independent woman with a distinct life plan and worthy purpose of living. She vigorously avers: "I am the woman with wings, the woman who can fly and fuck at will. I have smuggled this woman out of the oppressive landscape...I need to smuggle her out of her history, out of the dos and don'ts for good Indian girls. I am the woman who is willing to display her scars and put them within exhibition frames" (Kandasamy 247-248).

The status of having a female identity is the woman's ability to define her independence. The female phase does not impose any specific vision of a liberated woman but moreover allows the woman to be herself. Despite being trapped in oppressive boundaries, Saroja and the anonymous narrator were able to break all the shackles and were on their way to being architects of their fates.

Conclusion

It can be said that through the life of the unnamed protagonist of *When I Hit You* and Saroja of *Tamarind Mem*, Kandasamy and Badami successfully present all three phases of feminist literary traditions and the feminist movement summed up by Showalter. Thus, both the female protagonists are inspirational figures for our current time, when thousands of

women like them are eagerly seeking an escape route from the conventional notions of marriage and motherhood and eagerly awaiting recognition of their abilities. These two imaginary married women, in their desire for individual autonomy and courage in following their distinct life goals, basically anticipate a time when men and women share not just children, a house, and a garden and not only the accomplishment of their biological functions but also the commitments and desires of the work which builds the human existence and clear understanding of who they are.

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Psychology of Corporate Greed and Patriarchy in *Oryx and Crake*: Seeking a Treatment through J. Krishnamurthy's 'On Education'

Mohit Sharma
Research Scholar
Department of English
Chandigarh University
Gharuan, Mohali (Punjab) India
authormohit@gmail.com

Dr. Tanu Gupta
Professor
Department of English
Chandigarh University
Gharuan, Mohali (Punjab) India
tanu.e9349@cumail.in

Abstract

This paper is an attempt to unearth the reflection of the psychology of greed and the patriarchal structure of society in Margaret Atwood's Oryx and Crake*. The storyline and the characters in the novel present a handful of evidence to reflect the notion of how greed in the form of polished motifs can potentially cause mass destruction. Atwood foresees the futuristic society that has no space for arts & humanities, only technical advancement is presented as prime schema. Structural alterations and dehumanization are some of the outlines perceptible on the surface of the story. The capitalist ideological framework is the prime concern that the leading characters in the novel strive to maintain. Their personal gains remain on the top besides all the consequences that society could face. The concerns presented in the novel are quite relatable and serve as an alarm to aware society in general. A discourse on the problematics with scientific advancements and autonomy for corporates is also generated in the text. The present study will also explore the possibility of treatment and ways to deal with some of these challenges through J. Krishnamurthy's philosophy about education.*

Keywords: Oryx and Crake, Eco-Dystopia, Sustainable Development Goal, Patriarchy, Greed, Capitalism, Education, Margaret Atwood, J. Krishnamurthy

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Sequential exploration of both major and minor events related to humanity allows us to understand the destined future that the collective consciousness is heading towards. The reflection is well presented in almost all forms of expression. Literature is considered to be one of the most capable forms which make the readership. Many literary figures have been raising their concerns about the imbalance in the social order and even their imaginary mien

delivers more about the collective contemporary thought process. Eco-dystopia is one of the popular types of fiction which conveys plenty of emotions that future generations will be subjected to. Dystopia is considered to be an imagined world where people live dehumanized and fearful lives. (Merriam Webster) Besides the artistic and entertainment value of these writings, their calibre to generate a thoughtful discourse about existing scenarios of climate change and future possibilities is also adorable. This very well connects with the vision of sustainable development goals 13 and 15 which ensures taking measures to save the climate by 2030. Dillon, Denise B. (2018) in their study entitled "Footprint: The apocalyptic imprint of the end as immanent in Atwood's *Oryx and Crake"* argued that the notion of apocalypse as presented in many literary works has its alarming relevance for society to aware about the human desire to exercise ultimate control. The patriarchal structure of society wherein the female counterparts are considered to be subhuman makes them suffer and struggle for their existence and identities. A fusion of eco-dystopia and the patriarchal structure of society in a literary work allows a flawless logical representation of disorder prevailing in the storyline. Such thematic amalgamation and its artistic representation in some of the literary texts potentially shape the understanding of readership related to the subject matter. *The Sea and Summer* (1987), *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Stone Gods* (2007), and *Memory of the Water* (2012) are some of the popular eco-dystopian fiction works. These works majorly offer ecological collapse as a cause of the apocalyptic event and also mention the post-apocalyptic society.

Oryx and Crake (2003) is one of the popular works of Margaret Atwood. The work has received mentions and receptions from many reviewers and contemporary critics like John Mullan remark that Atwood had formed remade worlds in *Oryx and Crake* to warn readers about the threatful elements of the society. The novel *Oryx and Crake* is set in the near future. After the outbreak of apocalyptic event, in the post-apocalyptic space, the protagonist's exterior, as well as psychological experiences, form the entire story. The novel opens with two epigraphs that connect the readers with the narration, suggesting a baseline to conceive the story. The first epigraph is derived from Jonathan Swift's popular novel *Gulliver's Travel* (1726) which states that the intent of the author is not to amaze the readers with "Strange improbable tales" but to create a relatable tale. The epigraph clearly exposes the narrator's attitude towards the story that it may sound exaggerative but the deep string that the narration is connected with is quite relatable. The second epigraph has been borrowed from Virginia Wolf's popular fiction work *To the Lighthouse* (1927) which emphasizes navigating the "dangerous ways of the world". This mention can also be linked with the author's concern for the collective conduct of humanity and its direction. Putting both epigraphs in one order reveals that the upcoming narration is not mere imagination. The narration actually opens with a man named Snowman who happens to be somewhere in post-apocalyptic space and keeps going back in time. Time plays a pivotal role as it is used as a pathway to run the story. Snowman, in pre-apocalyptic time known as Jimmy, is all alone in the novel and keeps recalling his past experiences of childhood, friends, and interactions with Crake, Oryx, and many more. Jimmy's escape serves as a window for the readers to know more about the pre-apocalyptic social structure in the novel and the causes of the pandemic.

In a patriarchal structure, various institutions reflect the dominance of males in

society. It is in the book *Feminist Theory and Literary Practice* by Madsen "a cultural system that privileges men and all things masculine, and a political system that replaces power in the hands of men and thus serves male interests at the expense of women" (12). There have always been debates on comparing the potential of both genders. Ann Oakley in her book *Sex, Gender and Society* (2016) presents an argument that a child is never aware of gender identity and acquires the role of gender based on the role served by society. Jimmy is aware of the fact that Oryx has been suffering in her life still in his dreams he conceives the vision, "Oryx floating on her back in a swimming pool, wearing an outfit that is made of delicate white tissue paper petals." (Atwood 32) The idea of imagining the presence of Oryx in the above-shared context proves that despite the fact that Oryx must have suffered a lot she has been remembered as a source of quenching lust. The major cause of the apocalypse in the novel is considered to be technological advancement. Whereas the lack of involvement of women in the decision-making process is one such reason that potentially allowed the apocalypse to happen. Maria Vincenta et.al (2009) in their study entitled "Are women more empathetic than men? A longitudinal study in adolescence" conducted a longitudinal study and the results indicated that females are more empathetic in their responses in comparison to men. All the decisions are taken in the novel like working on the Blisspill project lack empathy for humankind. Such a problem could be solved by involving female counterparts in the decision-making process. Crake is not at all empathetic which is why he always finalizes a project based on a lucrative approach. He has a utilitarian approach to everything. Because of his lack of empathy, he never takes into account the consequences of his acts.

The surface-level factor which contributed negatively to making the apocalypse happen was the ecological imbalance but the concept of greed has an absolute stake in the formation of the causes of the apocalyptic event in the novel. Greed has been mentioned as one of the deadly sins in the Bible and it is also considered to be "the matriarch of the deadly clan" i.e., most of the time, it is the root cause of many other sins. Tickle, (2011) Manfred F.R. (2016) mention that as a sin the nature of greed is more like lust and gluttony i.e., it is a sin of excess. It confines one's self in the boundaries of never-ending craving for more than is needed. From the classic reference of greed, as argued in Plato's *Republic,* Wang Long, et al. (2012) asserts that the book coins two complementary approaches to greed. First, greed leads to unjust actions. Second, it hurts people in the process as well when it is successful. All the mentions in the classic as well as religious texts refer to some of the common layouts and fixed ideas about the results of greed and destruction can be discerned as a fundamental consequence. In the routine traces of greed-oriented behaviour, sometimes, destruction is not noticeable but in the events which have the capacity to affect the broader populace and space, the capacity to alter the future can easily be mapped. The structure of the society in the novel is patriarchal as all the major decisions are taken by male characters and also female characters are objectified. David Gamble (1967) in his study entitled "Social Organization and Political System" published in *The Wolof of Senegambia* identified patriarchy as a system that is purely ruled by men, whose authority is enforced through social, political, economic, and religious institutions.

The psychological state, attitude, and orientation of the major characters in the novel who function in pre-apocalyptic space expose the whys and wherefores of the apocalyptic

event. The common factor identified as a root cause for these insolences is 'greed'. The novel manifests the ultimate possibility that greed as a trait can cause to society. Life and other constructs face a challenging situation and apocalyptic event destructs the social order. The novel reflects corporate greed as one of the sub-themes also. The theme is portrayed through two main characters of the novel namely Jimmy and Crake. Crake is a science enthusiast who works on genetic engineering. He shows inordinate potential and passion for science & technology. He pursues his research in genetics and ignores all moral considerations. His passion for science is amalgamated with greed for power, money, and innovation. Initially, Jimmy works as a moral compass while having conversations with Crake but later gets used to of Crake's ways. As an example, incident when Crake shows ChickieNobs, mutated headless chickens, Jimmy reacts strangely. Seeing the headless chicken, Jimmy feels scared and awkward as it is mentioned, "When Jimmy first sees this mutated creature he is appalled and disgusted" (Atwood 202). But at a later stage he starts liking ChickieNobs. The change of mind that Jimmy experiences can be understood in the light of the psychological fact that humans tend to find patterns and there is always a probability that one may develop positive emotions about things that one hated before. It is suggested that the pattern-seeking nature of humans develops a kind of comfort while interacting with familiar things. Repeating encounters with something develops comfort which as a result contributes to liking the same. The other fact that adds sense to the change that Jimmy experiences about ChickieNobs is that our likings and disliking are majorly regulated by the people around us. As a social creature, it is one's desire to be liked and accepted by all. This very intention generates appeal to do what people like you do. Be it any of the reasons, the point remains that seeking acceptance or recognition by writing off ethics and values is a problematic way of conduct. The ultimate driver remains 'greed'.

Crake shares his experience and comparisons of both the projects in the novel as he shares "Compared to the paradise project, even the BlyssPluss Pill was a crude tool, although it would be a lucrative interim solution." (Atwood 257) Crake is always found convinced by the idea of earning and his greed has no limits. He keeps adding value to his products and believes in no channel of morality. His core interest remains to capture the market and supply accordingly. Even the textual analysis of the words used in the novel reflects that the word 'money' has been used more than 50 times in the novel. While arguing with Jimmy, Crake mentions, "Let's suppose for the sake of argument that the civilization as we know it gets destroyed. Want some popcorn?" (186) Despite having traces of destruction in his plan, Crake never considers the possibilities seriously. He, being the lead scientist of his own project, develops his own people with genetic alterations and called them Crakers, and identifies his creation as developed humans. He considered that humans are weak and deserve not to be. Of Crakers, Jimmy states while recalling his encounter with them:

> They were naked but not like Noodie News: there was no self-consciousness, none at all. At first, he couldn't believe them, they were so beautiful. Black, yellow, white, brown, all available skin colours. Each individual was exquisite. Are they robots or what? (255)

Jimmy doubted that Crakers don't have consciousness and also found it strange to have a look at them. He also perceived that they would be robots. Crake's urge to alter the human race and

develop a new structure had in-built greed for power and money.

> The exploration of the character of Crake brings forth some relevant and relatable learning experiences for the readers in general. Understanding the attitude of Crake's drive in context with his ways of conduct allows one to relate it with the presence of a similar set of traits in humans in the real world. It is so unfortunate that our history pages are filled with stories of greed. Most of the mentions are about the greed of leaders for power, money, and expansion. England's expansionist greed with the intellectual polish of colonial justifications is an apt example of such a destructive trait that affected the social, economic, political, and psychological order of a great portion of the world. It altered cultures, demolished identities, and hybridized the ecosystem. (Megan Caldwell 2017)

Another major construct that regulates the plot of the novel is capitalist ideology. Capitalist structure advocates profit orientation and its implications are ignored for individual gains. Material developments and technological advancements are considered to be the foremost areas that speed up in a capitalist system but human-centric needs and wellbeing are compromised. Karl Marx in his Das Kapital shared a systematic understanding of the pros and cons of the capitalist structure of society and economy. He mentions that on the one hand capitalism destructed the feudal structure but on the other hand, it establishes a new structure that develops additional challenges like inequality, exploitation, and a profit-centric attitude. The novel, *Oryx and Crake* develops a significant discourse about how hysterical passion can lead to mass destruction. The commodification of human beings and efforts to alter human destiny for corporate gain are two of the prominent sub-themes that the novel deliberates about. Crake's madness can be understood by the mention:

> RejoovenEsense hoped to hit the market with the various blends on offer. They'd be able to create totally chosen babies that would incorporate any feature, physical or mental or spiritual, that the buyer might wish to select. The present methods on offer were very hit-or-miss, said Crake. (257)

The mention reveals the intention as well as attitude of Crake and his work. It indicates the fact that kids are considered products and variety is offered in the form of traits that people want in their kids. Parents are termed as consumers and traits are considered as specifications. The entire discourse designates toward the idea of commodifying humans and the core orientation remains the possibility of earning profit. The impression is further extended in another mention which also shows their confidence and zeal to carry out the project:

> But with the paradise method, there would be ninety-nine percent accuracy. Whole populations could be created that would have pre-selected characteristics. Beauty of course that would be in high demand and docility: several world leaders had expressed interest in that. (257)

The project's identified objective remains to serve the corporate class as the reference propagates that several world leaders have raised their demand to initiate genetic alterations to supply docile humans. A significant proportion of the attitude of such expression can be connected with capitalist ideology as described by Karl Marx "Capitalism is a system that symbolizes the most acute form of exploitation, inequality, and polarization of classes." (127)

Traces of such ideology are prominently visible in the discourse offered in the novel as, despite the segment of production, the factors of production are also under the control of the market. Both Jimmy and Crake live in compounds that are actually governed by corporations and the autonomy to work without any answerability and they don't follow any norms or rules. About the future of governments, Atwood stated, "Future governments are relatively ineffectual unlike today" (Margaret Atwood Interview). Crake enjoys freedom in the compounds to conduct his experiments as per his wish. He is not bound to any legal or ethical obligations.

The systemic understanding of all the faculties in the novel exhibits that the lack of empathy in the characters is also responsible for the disaster. Crake's approach towards fellow humans is cruel. Du, Lanlan (2020) identified a lack of empathy as the primary reason for the destruction presented in *Oryx and Crake.* A holistic treatment of such vices can be found in the philosophy of education present in J. Krishnamurthy's discourse. In his book *On Education* (2001), he discussed how societal objectives contribute to the learning process of new generations. While discussing the role of society in education, he mentions, "Can education see to it that human mind is not drawn into that vast stream and so destroyed; see that the mind is never sucked into that stream". Krishnamurthy advocated the idea of possible mental exclusion of the new generation in order to break the harmful stream of society. He believed that with such intervention, society can have a new human. Whereas, Crake's way of having a new human in the novel is by genetic alterations. While responding to a student's question, "You ask us to change, what do we change into?"(On Education 26), Krishnamurthy replied:

> . . . Look, you are violent or greedy and you want to change yourself into a person who is not greedy? Not wanting to be greedy is another form of greed…But if you say I'm greedy, I'll find out what it means, why I'm greedy, and what is involved in it, then you'll understand greed and you'll be free of greed. (27)

J. Krishnamurthy's way of dealing with greed or any vices is self-awareness. He propagated that instead of bringing discipline to conduct in a certain way, if one develops an understanding of one's own self, it would help in becoming a new man. Crake lacks such understanding and so is the case with Jimmy.

Further, the lack of a positive set of emotions also leads to poor decision-making that considers not holistic well-being. Klienlogel, Emmanuelle, and Joerge Dietz (2013) identified in their study that empathy plays a positive role in the decision-making process. The lesser stake of female characters in the formation of narration of the novel is identified as a triggering factor for the apocalypse. For the major characters in the novel, women is not more than an object of entertainment and physical satisfaction, "On the screen in slow motion, an underwater ballet of flesh and blood under stress, hard and soft joining and separating, groans and screams, close-ups of the clenched eye and clenched teeth, spurts of this or that." (Atwood 68) Patriarchal mindset that characters have in the novel makes it difficult to empathize with the situation and leads to a stage for improvement.

The study can potentially become a ground equipped with advanced faculties to continue the discourse on eco-dystopian literary works, and exploration of characters' personalities to identify traits relatable to human society and responsible for the apocalyptic

event in the novel. The study concludes that the patriarchal structure of society disturbs the social order and individual ability to foresee the challenges involved. The study also contributes to mapping the concerns and objectives raised in the UN sustainable development goals with the additional objectives other than entertainment that dystopian fiction serves. A discourse about mapping literary works with SDGs is also coined in the study that can possibly be taken further in future research. It suggests developing empathy, refining characters, and celebrating diversity and equality in unity as some of the major factors to align the narration with a positive attitude.

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My Mother is an Amphibious Creature: Deconstructing Essentialist Motherhood in Anuradha Roy's *All the Lives We Never Lived*

Subhashini R
Research Scholar
UGC- Centre for South and Southeast Asian Studies
University of Madras
Chennai (Tamil Nadu) India
subhashinirajasri@gmail.com

Abstract

The study of motherhood is an intrinsic part of feminism and women's rights. From the onset of feminist movements, women have been questioning the essentialist and biological notions of motherhood in women's lives. Feminists of the West analysed the concept of motherhood as a patriarchal concept that subjugated women into a role of putting children's emotional and physical needs before their own. In the Indian context, the nationalist narratives visualized woman or 'Bharatiya Naari' as a symbol with values of freedom, chastity and wholehearted dedication to nation and family, transforming her into a symbol rather than an individual with self-identity and personal ambitions. In the 21st century, feminists have questioned the patriarchal ideologies around motherhood and emphasized women's narratives as important texts to examine the female perspective on private and domestic spaces. This paper focuses on rethinking the concept of motherhood as a biological essentialism in womanhood through Anuradha Roy's novel All the Lives We Never Lived*. The paper discusses how Roy's subversive novel breaks free from the traditional notions of motherhood being the essential role of a female and argues for subjective understanding of her self-identity.*
Keywords: Motherhood, Patriarchal, Self-Identity, Subversive Narrative, Essentialist

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Introduction

> But motherhood and the keeping of the home as a private refuge were not, could not be, the central occupation of a women, nor were mother and child circumscribed into an isolated relationship. (Rich 47)

The human female's capacity to give birth and subsequent role as a 'mother' has an important role in the gendered hierarchy of the heteronormative society. This means that the physical ability to give birth to children has led to gender significations and a definition of motherhood that aids the patriarchal binaries of social roles among men and women. Nancy Chodorow observed that the biological process of reproduction and lactation has often been combined with a mother's care labour after the birth of the child so that it can be normalized as an essential part of a woman's identity (3). Men usually participated in labour outside the house while women remained within the private space of the home, engaged in care labour that often went unpaid. This relationship with labour went beyond physical labour. Women

had to cater to the emotional needs of the children, men and elderly members of the family. With the rise of capitalism and modern education, there was a rise in nuclear families as well. The need for women's participation in the private realm and childcare increased as men's role in the public sphere increased. Even when women started participating in the public realm after the 19th Century, mothering and care labour remained women's responsibility. Historical evidence indicates that even though women have greater rights and a better social standing in recent years, the division of labour within the family largely remained patriarchal and archaic.

Cultural and social understanding of gender has a major role in defining what it means to be a woman and a mother. The roles of men and women, in the society, depend mostly on the value that the society assigns to concepts like reproduction, fertility and social space. Adrienne Rich explains that in a patriarchal society, the core is the system of family where the father's power and kinship depends on the idea of private property and the significance that it places on his biological descendants. Such a system required women's roles to be monogamic so that there is no social and public doubt that the woman is carrying his child. Rich attributes sexual division of labour, sexual possession of women and legitimacy of women's motherhood to this patriarchal structure (60).

Cultural beliefs, images, literature, social discourses, political structures have worked in tandem with the patriarchal ideologies to reinforce every generation with ideals that normalized women's roles in the society. Traditions and rituals actively shape the archetypal images of women as mothers, sisters, sacred wives and dutiful daughters who go on to fulfil their biological duty as mothers and care-givers. These discourses also reiterate the importance of a woman to remain sexually chaste and loyal to the male members of the family.

In her paper on the relationship between women's movement and motherhood, Sheila Rowbotham says that women's liberation movement opened a place for women to question themselves whether motherhood was their inescapable fate or if it came naturally (82). Although many women felt incredible guilt even for questioning their motherhood choices, second wave feminism laid the emphasis on care labour, questioned the sexist, unequal nature of motherhood and the economic dependency it brings with it. Feminists, on a large scale, thought of motherhood as an extrinsic discourse perpetrated by the society to influence women. While some accepted the radical argument, many other motherhood as a part of their life rather than their social conditioning.

Liz Heron pointed out that if bearing a child bearing and nurturing is celebrated as the zenith of women's achievements, it would only promote biological determinism. It would exclude those women who balance paid work with child care, women who share their childcare with their partners, single mothers, lower class women whose economic situation makes childcare very hard (Rowbotham 86). As women were defined and appreciated for their biological capabilities, the right to choose became a legal and social barrier.

Biological Determinism

Biological Determinism is a theory that believes that one's anatomy and physical body is the ultimate destiny of that human. Fulfilling the roles of the sexed body becomes the centre of attention and by that definition, biological determinism believes that the gendered

roles created in the society are created naturally and they are essential for the future of humankind. But, feminists like Andrea O'Reilly and Adrienne Rich have argued against the essentialism that is imposed upon women's gender identity and the idealization of the 'perfect mother'. Essentialist narratives postulated theories of mothering and care as women's natural identity, naturalization, and normalization and idealizing women as 'perfect mother' have also developed in societies over the years. D. Lynn Hallstein who writes on the concept of 'intensive mothering' essentialization of motherhood and recognizing women as the primary parent has economic consequences as well as social position that ignores subjectivity and empowerment (99). Both O'Reilly and Hallstein argue that motherhood as an archetype privatises women's space within the home, defines the relationship of a woman to her child and her reproductive powers but also constitutes an institution that utilizes female potential under the male control or patriarchal society (105).

Childbearing and caregiving under the patriarchal structure is such a paradoxical activity. It humanizes mothering as an activity that cannot be opined upon or politicized. But, at the same time, it politicizes the mother-child relationship under the male rule—considering only biological mothers, married mothers and heterosexual mothers as the right mothers.

Sara Ruddick, in her paper on maternal thought, conceptualizes mothering as a social entity where the parents actually care for the baby and are not defined by its biological ability. The most important line, perhaps, would be the social construction of mothering that is underwritten on how we view women. It has a significant impact on women's bodies, their passions as well as their aspirations. As women's bodies are viewed under the shadow of private spaces and repressed into an ideal or archetype, their capacities, achievements and welfare hardly figure into the picture. The question remains—what makes women's mothering 'natural'? Bio-evolutionary theory of woman's mothering is seen as an irrefutable fact simply because they have always been mothers. Anthropologists derive their theory of mothering from the biological and the functional way of thinking. They draw the parallels between hunter-gatherer society and the present society to view how the public space is considered to be a man's domain due to their superior physical abilities. But, one theory that has stood the test of time is the sociological theory that sexual division of labour was the true reason for motherhood in societies. Sociologists believe that manual labour of rearing children, gathering food, repetitive activities within the walls of the home translated into maternal instinct in women (Chodrow 31). Post-industrialization contributions of women outside the private realm of the home showed us that sexual divisions of labour were not set in stone. The socio-economic value of women's paid employment was often seen as a necessity for the lower classes of the society. The Victorian society went so far as to deify motherhood; once again revering the woman for her chastity and docile nature.

Samitha Sen, observed that the Victorian ideology led to a transformation in the socio-economic structure of the Indian society as well. The class differences between the 'magi' woman (lower class, factory worker) and the 'bhadramahila' woman (upper class) played a major role in shaping the discourse on the 'nationalist woman'— a beacon of hope and pride for the growing Indian nationalism and freedom struggle (80). The Gandhian nationalists envisioned the ideal Indian woman as a picture of a docile beauty; a long-suffering, nurturing mother who was invested in birthing and nurturing strong, able, strong-

minded nationalist men. Her task was to inculcate patriotism and religious consciousness in her children through her pious and sacred nature. Like the Victorian 'Angel in the House', the 'Bharatiya Nari' was also depicted in the Bhadramahila culture fair-skinned and wearing a white saree, symbolizing her purity and innocence (Sarkar 2012). In such Gandhian discourses, the ideal woman would abandon her self-centred passions, ambitions and pursuits for financial stability so that she would boycott foreign goods and be a loyalist.

Motherhood in Anuradha Roy's *All the Lives We Never Lived*

A Potter and a victim of communal hate who teaches his craft to a young Indian-American woman, violence against women, pain, rejection of love, independent mothers in patriarchal societies are all images in Anuradha Roy's eloquent writing. She is a bestselling author who has published over 5 books—*An Atlas of Impossible Longing, The Folded Earth, Sleeping on Jupiter, All the Lives we Never Lived and The Earthspinner*. Her third book *Sleeping on Jupiter* was long listed for the Man Booker Prize and won the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature. Her fourth novel *All the Lives We Never Lived* won the Tata Book of the Year Award for Fiction 2018.

In *All the Lives We Never Lived*, the protagonist Myshkin's mother Gayatri is a young, educated, beautiful and talented young woman who wanted to have the freedom to pursue her passion for art and dance. Set in the 1930s, the novel explains what freedom means for different people. In the time of revolution and change, Roy's novel traces the life of a young woman who rebels against social traditions to follow her individual passions and ambition.

Gayatri's father Agni Sen was a liberal professor intent on educating his daughter. He took pride in her skills and exposed her to a world of modern art, classical music and languages. His conservative wife, Gayatri's mother, was opposed to this as she found it dangerous to encourage their daughter's independent streak. In many ways, Gayatri's mother was convinced that women were meant for the private space of a family and the house. So, she often regarded Gayatri's talents and her ambitions to be exorbitant for a woman to possess.

In *Interrogating Motherhood*, Jasodhara Bagchi says that as a mother, the woman acts as a gatekeeper to the patriarchal order of family and society, educating their children to adhere to the traditions of Indian society. In India's caste society, the need to maintain the social order was crucial (3). So, there was constant monitoring and parroting of what it means to be a good wife and motherhood despite the fact that Gayatri was least interested in either one of those things. During Gayatri's trip with her father, we see that several historical characters appear. All of them are greatly appreciated and admired by Gayatri, who seeks to learn from them and pursue the path of excellence. Gayatri met Walter Spies, a renowned German painter and artist in Dutch-ruled Bali. Spies accompanied them throughout the trip and introduced them to several dancing schools, musical concerts and even painting classes where Gayatri decided that she would like to hone her skills. But, when Gayatri and Agni decided to travel to Java in July of the same year, Agni's health worsened from the sea travel and he passed away. Gayatri's mother, a traditionalist, believed it was Gayatri who had caused her husband's death. She immediately arranged for her daughter's wedding to Agni's student Nek Chand. The dismayed and grief-stricken Gayatri who was mourning her father's passing,

could not even comprehend what was happening to her. In fact, she wasn't even consulted in the process, making it a forcible marriage.

As a person who visited the Sen household frequently, Gayatri's relationship with him, before marriage, was respectful. He liked her very much and accepted the marriage wholeheartedly. But, he did not seek Gayatri's opinion in the relationship. After marriage, Nek Chand's relationship with Gayatri was tumultuous, to say the least. Most people considered them a good match as Nek was a liberal-minded, modernist who would be accepting of an educated woman like Gayatri. But, Nek was very apprehensive about Gayatri's interest in art. Despite being a nationalist and advocate for women's rights, Nek expected Gayatri to be a good housewife and a good mother to Myshkin instead of pursuing her passion for art. Nek admired Mukti Devi, a Gandhian freedom fighter who represented the values of nationalism, sacrifice and devotion for the country. He expected Gayatri to follow the same path he followed and expected her to care for the history and freedom of India. Her other interests were considered to be hobbies while her son was to be her priority. In her work on women's role as mothers during the nationalist struggle, Bagchi pointed out that many men in the nationalist struggle either remained conservatives defending the patriarchal society, or became modernists who educated women and expected them to engage in the freedom struggle (6). Women took an active role in Gandhian philosophy and were advised to be educated mothers who could impart knowledge and a patriotic consciousness in their children.

It was Mukti Devi's devotion and national fervour that interested Nek. Women's empowerment and the liberal thought were Nek's interests but only when they appealed to being under the role of a mother, wife or daughter. The individual identity of the woman or her personal interest as an artist or a painter became so hostile for Nek's identity that even after Myshkin was born, he constantly berated Gayatri for dancing in her own garden. That is when Gayatri emotionally blurts out, “I have not been dancing in the garden. I haven't been dancing anywhere. I've stopped everything. I don't sing. I don't dance. I hardly ever paint. What more do you want?” (Roy 22). Nek believed that Gayatri was impulsive and often repeated that dignity of the family and of the individual-self did not come from dancing but from reading history and being a good mother to Nek. When he reminded her that he was a progressive man who allowed his wife to be free, Gayatri questioned the nature of the 'freedom' that was kept shut tightly and only offered to her when he deemed it necessary.

Her questioning was not misplaced. Myshkin, the narrator, recalls that his mother used to order colours from Culcutta, where they shipped it from London. But as soon as it would arrive, Nek would take them away and return it to her only when he saw it fit. He regarded it to be a joke but Gayatri felt stifled in such a patriarchal environment. Myshkin's narration shows that he knew how his mother felt as his father treated her talents as hobbies and saw fit to make fun of her. When Walter Spies and Beryl de Zoete visited Gayatri to learn about Indian dance, Myshkin recalls how his father's friend Arjun Chacha treated their interest as a futile endeavour, asking what there was in dance that needed to be studied. He simply dismissed it in a misogynistic manner saying, “Dance was invented so that men could look at women, not for women to look at women” (Roy 53). He even warned Myshkin's father to control his wife, saying a man's control must be like iron. Likening a man's control over his family to the benign

dictatorship of the British rule over India, Arjun Chacha reminds Nek that the company Gayatri keeps will ruin her name and his reputation.

Nek despised Gayatri's parenting and thought of her to be a bad influence on his son. In arguments about freedoms, Gayatri speaks of her freedom to paint, live on her own terms and not be dismissed by Nek while he constantly reminds her of her role as a mother. Enraged with his preoccupation with her role in the house, Gayatri asked him, "What good will the great nation's freedom do for me? Tell me that! Will it make me free? Will I be able to choose how to live?" (Roy 67). She posits her personal freedom over Nek's notion of freedom of country. Although Nek accuses her of being selfish and thinking of only herself while freedom for India was at stake, it was painfully obvious to Myshkin that even the smallest of freedoms for his mother came only at the cost of his father's approval.

When Gayatri bemoans how her entire life has become her son, the upper class society frowns upon her personal interests and individualism. From Myshkin's perspective, Gayatri was an extremely intuitive and caring mother. Rather than behave as a disciplinarian dictating her choices, Gayatri's parenting was more involved. She loved to cycle with Myshkin, kept him away from relatives who made comments on his health and treated him as a dear friend, teaching him the value of beauty and happiness in life. In fact, Myshkin points out that it was Gayatri whose involvement and influence that shaped him into the man he was in his older age.

Gayatri decided to leave her traditional life as a mother and wife, and travel the world and learn art, music and dance with Walter Spies. Many had assumed that she had run away with an Englishman. Roy did not stereotype her as a villainous or immoral woman who has ignored her family for her base instincts. Gayatri's letters to her friend Lisa (which later comes into Myshkin's possession) offer a deep understanding into the mind of a modern mother who had to rebel against the social customs and the disgust of the society in order to be free from the trappings of her life. Roy works her magic into these letters as she characterizes Gayatri as an unconventional, ambitious woman who felt imprisoned by the constant mocking and the society's internalized biological and cultural myths about motherhood felt like imprisonment.

As a nuanced character, Gayatri is also not a perfect artist who can divorce herself from her beloved child. She constantly doubts herself and does not write even one letter without mentioning how much she missed Myshkin and how she longed to take him where she went. The letters also speak of Gayatri's affection for Brijen, their neighbour who treated her with the respect and intelligence Nek never gave her. Gayatri's dream takes a subversive stance as she admits that she wants Myshkin to know her not as a successful mother but a mother who was successful in life.

Similar to Elizabeth Gaskell's titular character from the 1853 novel *Ruth*, Gayatri is viewed as an 'imperfect mother' and a 'fallen mother' as she no longer fulfilled the traditional, cultural roles of a mother. In a conservative society of rising India, Gayatri's rebellion was considered unbecoming and practically unfeminine for a 'bhadramahila' woman (upper caste) and a 'Bharatiya Nari' as she does not fall in accordance with the laid down system of motherhood. Roy problematizes the bond between Myshkin and Gayatri as her individualism and appreciation for art plays a transformative role in Myshkin's personality and career. Despite his mother's physical absence, Myshkin's career as a horticulturist and his interest in botanical drawings bear her influence. In her article on subversive motherhood, Anita Wilson

writes that Victorian-Era British magazines warned mothers of yielding authority, enforce corporal punishment and "discharge their duties" (89). Quite like Ruth's son Leonard, Myshkin's appreciation of his mother's judicious nurturing was accompanied by a corresponding anger and resentment. The maternal bonding between Gayatri and Myshkin revisions the standards of child-rearing and allows the readers flexibility to challenge the patriarchal and hegemonical images of perfect motherhood.

Conclusion

All the Lives We Never Lived is a feminist novel that speaks about the struggles of female artists during the pre-independence era; it is equally about an atypical yet exemplary mother who sought freedom and individuality. In this novel, there is a significant revolt against how motherhood is viewed by masculinist ideology. Roy's aim is to pose questions, interrogate what freedom meant for different people and how both freedom and motherhood are actually experienced by women. Here, the author leads Myshkin to reveal that Gayatri was an independent spirit, "an amphibious creature- of earth as well as air, yet not wholly of one element" (Roy 262) and not the woman made for motherhood and traditional femininity. In lieu of the constructed myth of motherhood, Roy offers an empowered motherhood, in O'Reilly's terms allowing women to defy and substitute the reductionist oppression of patriarchy (128).

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Exploring Gender and Ecological Sustenance: Re-Reading Select Poems by Sarojini Naidu and Lal Ded through Ecofeminism

Sneha Das
Research Scholar
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
National Institute of Technology
Patna (Bihar) India
snehad.ph21.hs@nitp.ac.in

Dr. Zeeshan Ali
Assistant Professor
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences,
National Institute of Technology
Patna (Bihar) India
zali@nitp.ac.in

Abstract

Ecofeminism serves as a modern quest for annihilating the sufferings meted out to both women and nature. This paper through an exploration of the select poems by Bhakti poet Lal Ded of the medieval period and nature poet Sarojini Naidu of the pre-modern period through the lens of Ecofeminism tries to delve deep into the fact how the Indian women poets of different epochs through their creative faculties have continuously tried to establish an all-round gender and ecological sustenance. Considering women as curators of nature both these poets aim to attain equal rights for all women. Sarojini Naidu and Lal Ded through their poetry have precisely tried to weave nature, women, and spirituality with the same thread to liberate both women and nature from the long-built shackles of patriarchal domination and exploitation. Hence, this paper aims to highlight these Ecofeminist aspects by exploring some of the tantalising poetical compositions by the above mentioned two different South Indian Women poets of two different eras.
Keywords: Ecofeminism, Lal Ded, Nature, Poetry, Sarojini Naidu, Women.

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Introduction

> Being a planetary citizen does not need space travel. It means being conscious that we are part of the universe and of the earth. The most fundamental law is to recognise that we share the planet with other beings, and that we have a duty to care for our common home. (Shiva ch.1)

Since the very beginning of our civilization, we have observed disparities in every field done based on gender differences. Women are being considered, since the time

immemorial, as the weaker sex as compared to the all-powerful ruling men. Women's mentality has been conditioned in a way where their servility towards men to serve their greedy needs has been justified time and again. This habitual exploitation of someone who is the producer and is gifted with the capability of child birth has extended its hands towards the innocent fertile nature. Nature and women are sided together as the ones who are expected to serve and give pleasure to the avaricious desires of mankind. Hence, the creation of the binary where nature and women are othered against the materialistic self of men and culture is something that has been attacked by revolutionists from time to time to achieve the goals of gender equality and sustainable development of the mother Earth. Among these one of the most modern quests towards the achievement of gender equality, keeping in mind both the suffering of women and the exploitation of nature is Ecofeminism. The theory urges humans to remember that we are a part of this Earth and our attitude should be eco-centric rather than being anthropocentric. Therefore, this paper by exploring the select poems by Sarojini Naidu and Meena Kandasamy through the lens of Ecofeminism tries to delve deep into the fact that how the gender and ecological sustenance could be attained through creative poetical compositions by Indian English Poets. Sarojini Naidu and Lal Ded through their poetry have always tried to interlace nature and women with the same filament to liberate both from the long-built shackles of the patriarchal society and hence, this paper tries to highlight these aspects by exploring some of her tantalising poetical compositions.

Objectives

This paper tries to reconnoitre:

- A few select poems by re-reading the poetry of Sarojini Naidu and Lal Ded by applying the theory of Ecofeminism.
- How gender equality and environmental sustenance are achieved through creative poetic faculties?
- How women poets starting from the classical to pre-modern period have intermingled ecology and human culture to give a free expression of their concealed conflicts of the mind?

Theoretical Background

With the upcoming modern era, the different waves of feminist theories seemed to be futile in achieving the greater goals of gender equality. Though the condition started to develop at a faster pace, there are certain hindrances that restricted its full-fledged success. Theories are not always enough rather until and unless comparisons are done or parallels are drawn between two objects, masses will never be able to comprehend the real scenario. An unswerving comparison of the endangered nature with women led to a direct attack of inequality and tortures done on women by the superstitious patriarchal society. Revolutionists tried to draw the parallel between the miserable condition of the women and nature which indirectly allowed people to view and understand how this society was leading towards destruction by their mistreatment towards both women and nature. With the gradual

adaptation of this parallelism, the theory of Ecofeminism came into being.

The term Ecofeminism is also known as 'ecological feminism' which was first coined by French feminist Francoise d'Eaubonne in the year 1974. The main aim was to demolish all the types of patriarchal controls over the society in the field of socio-economic, cultural, natural or individual. For every ecofeminist revolutionist, nature's first target was that they wanted to liberate women and nature collectively from the domination of man. Women took able steps and imagined the very soil of the Earth as their own soul. By the 1780s, the movement became popular all across the globe and many critics urged the theorist Ynestra King as the reason and leader for such a wide popularization. It would be justified to quote from the introduction to *Feminism and Ecology*, "Ecofeminism is a movement that sees a connection between the exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and the oppression of the women. It emerged in the mid-1970s alongside second wave feminism and the green movement. Ecofeminism brings together elements of the feminist and the green movements, while at the same time offering a challenge to both." (Mellor 1)

Literature: A Tool to Propagate Ecofeminism

The above-mentioned situations of women and nature are brought into the limelight by the works of literature. It is literature which helps to spread awareness among the masses about the various aspects of the society besides any other social movements and propaganda. An author through his/her artistic faculties probes deeper into the psychology of readers and moulds it in a positive way to make it a receptacle of thousands of thoughts and ideologies. Therefore, literature helped to popularize the Ecofeminist theory's relevance to society by justifying its application to our day-to-day life. Many feminist writers came into being promoting the aspect of Ecofeminism in their works providing an all-new angle to study literature. Two such female writers from South India who has successfully tried to depict the parallel between women and nature is Lal Ded and Sarojini Naidu and if we delve deep into some their selected poetry in this paper, we can come across how their poetic compositions reflect the need for establishing a relationship between women and nature in order to expose the sufferings of both and liberate both of them from being subjugated.

Ecofeminist Consciousness in Sarojini Naidu's Poetry

To deal with the poetry of Sarojini Naidu we can very well find how she often deals with the themes of women and nature in her poems where she intricately tries to weave ecological concern and women oppression within the same thread. Sarojini Naidu's poem *The Queen's Rival* is one of the best specimens of Ecofeminist theme where the poet upholds the leitmotif of how both nature and women seemed to be unsatisfied as they are seen as mere objects of luxury to be used by the materialistic human world. Initially, the description of the lady's bedchamber full of well-chosen expensive items made from elements from nature exposes the greedy nature of human beings. The bed made from ivory, the feather on Queen's breast made from Lawping bird's feather, the walls decorated with various natural stones and

gems, etc., also discloses the fact that how the elements from nature are extracted extravagantly and unnecessarily for human satisfaction. Despite of all such things arranged by the king for the Queen, the dissatisfaction and discontent of the lady towards all such superficial items reveals how a woman has always been kept imprisoned by the men on the bed of roses and is considered as a mere toy to be dolled up as wished by the patriarchal society. Her discontent despite such chosen materials from nature around shows how a woman can never be satisfied by exploiting nature. She finds no pleasure in such items unlike men. The confinement of the Queen and her complaints show that her King is not able to make her feel happy. The inability of the king to comprehend the reason for the Queen's dissatisfaction reveals that the patriarchal society can never understand what a woman wants rather they impose their own thoughts upon them forcibly. Hence, the poem conveys the idea of both the exploitation of nature and isolation of women where both women and nature are objectified by men which as a result conveys the Ecofeminist turn in this poetry. Not only this but also seven bridesmaids bought by the king are described as mere objects which exposes the fact how women are considered to be just as an item of beauty and contentment to be purchased and sold by men:

Seven queens shone around her Ivory bed,
Like Seven soft gems on a silken thread,
Like seven fair lamps in a royal tower,
Like seven bright petals of Beauty's flower. (Naidu)

The above lines are indicative of how women are reduced to mere gems, fair lamps and beauty's flower and how their worth is measured in terms of these inanimate objects. This lack of identity and lack of purpose in the Queen's life is also reflective of the condition of women in our society where they need to be liberated along with nature from the shackles of patriarchal oppression to bring about a sustainable development of the world. Besides just dealing with the notion of gender equality, Ecofeminism also deals with the various aspects of establishing a non-linear and non-patriarchal society and urgers to achieve a world that respects the organic processes and holistic connections between women and nature. Hence, the above lines of the poetry rightly fulfil these objectives of Ecofeminism by attacking upon the wastage of natural resources and drawing a connection between natural elements and feminine emotions.

Another poem that offers a tantalising instance of Ecofeminism by Sarojini Naidu is *My Dead Dream* where she speaks about her long-built dream that she has buried under the forest of snow. This burial of dream and its re-occurrence with the images of nature as explained in the poetry convey the idea of how women have always kept on burying her dreams and how she has used nature as the only means to revive and regain those dreams momentarily where it is said, "Would you tear from my lintels these sacred green garlands of leaves? / Would you scare the white, nested, wild pigeons of joy from my eaves? / Would you touch and defile with dead fingers the robes of my priest?" (Naidu)

Naidu's assertion "Go back to your Grave, O my Dream" in the 3rd stanza refers to how she is constantly fighting between her wish to live her dream and to bury it at the same time. The passionate appeal in this poetry reveals how desirous her dreams are but she tries to entomb it because may be society would never let her fulfil those dreams in real life. She

seeks the help of nature and draws images like green garlands of leaves and wild pigeons to show the eruption of dream from beneath the ground which in turn reveals the fact that her emotions are mingled with the elements of nature which in turn helps her to draw a parallel between the two exposing the tenets of Ecofeminism. The suppression of dreams also shows how women are compelled in our society to forcibly kill her dreams and aspirations to move ahead in life. The domination of men has inflicted a lifelong pain upon the lives of women giving rise to gender inequality which also hampers the proper sustenance of the natural world.

Even the frequent analogies drawn between a woman's dream and nature exposes the fact that both nature and women are treated alike and to express the pain of one the assistance of the other is greatly needed. The womanly expressions would remain incomplete if nature is not involved and this parallelism of thoughts drawn between women and nature results in the revelation of the concerns regarding environmental sustainability making the people aware of these facts in order to bring about a positive change through these poetic literary compositions.

Ecofeminist Consciousness of Lal Ded

Women Bhakti poet Lal Ded used her devotional poetry as a medium to voice herself and break the social and cultural taboos at a time when even feminism was an unheard term in Indian scenario. It is through the mysticism of Lal Ded one comes to know the underlying thoughts which are those of rebellion, revocation, and defiance. Lal Ded's devotion towards her Lord made her endure the domestic violence of her husband and mother-in-law. Ded, while fetching a pitcher of water, used to meditate and worship her Lord. Her mother-in-law utilized this practice of Lal Ded to use as a weapon against her and complained to her husband who in turn took Lalla's visit to the pond as a conjugal infidelity. This reflects the tormenting story of the life of a woman in our society. She did not endure this for long, rather revolted against the domestic violence by rejecting her married life and chose to lead a solitary life and created poetry as a platform for self-expression. Lalleswari observed faith in the formless and she attributed free divine and held it to be the highest transcendental vantage point. She followed the mystic tradition of Shaivism. Her nakedness reveals her oneness with nature where she finds peace and freedom from worldly tortures. Her poems, therefore, could be well comprehended as the perfect example of blended aspects of feminism and the green movement.

Most of her poems are translated by Ranjit Hoskote where he has named her poetry as numerals. Hence, for the study this paper would firstly, analyse her poem *61* where Lal Ded is seen to reject the conventional elements of worship taken from nature and hence, seems to save nature and embarks on the modern mission of Ecofeminism. She says that it is useless to pick up Kusha grass, flowers, sesame seed, water for worshipping Sambhu i.e., Lord Shiva because he dwells in nature and has merged himself into nature. She says this in the following lines.

Kusha grass, flowers sesame seed, lamp, water:
It's just another list for someone who's listened

Really listened, to his teacher. Every day
He sinks deeper
Into Shambu, frees himself from the trap of action and reaction…(qtd. in I, Lalla: The Poems of Lal Ded ch. 1)

Since spiritualism branches off as an important tenet of Ecofeminism, in the above poetry Lal Ded wishes to convey the idea of spiritualism in nature and her intention to merge into nature to liberate the sinful soul brings out the essence of Spiritual Ecofeminism. The concept of pantheism i.e., the presence of God in nature and the aspirations of a confident lady to emancipate herself in order to unite with the pious nature reveals the Ecomystical turn of her poetry.

In another poem *105*, her Lord who is the embodiment of nature is said to have pierced the skin of human beings to merge into it. The following lines expresses the above thoughts in the poetry:

The Lord has spread the subtle net of himself across the world.
See how He gets under your skin, inside your bones.
If you can't see Him while you are alive,
Don't expect a special vision once you are dead. (qtd. in I, Lalla: The Poems of Lal Ded ch. 1)

In these lines of poetry, the imagery of the Lord moving inside the skin and bones conveys the idea that how well we are intertwined with nature. Lal Ded's poetries are indicative of how a woman's self-understanding results in rejoicing in every element of nature. She spreads the message that self and divine (i.e., nature) are one and that all dualisms are illusory. Hence, in14th century, a time which was much far away from the arrival of the concepts of deconstruction, a women saint and poet like Lalla nourished the confidence to talk about the deconstruction of binaries or dualism of self and the other taking it a way too ahead by blending it with the theory of ecofeminism. In consonance with Kashmir Shaiva doctrine, a doctrine which is non-dualistic in nature and believes in the primacy of the universal consciousness, similarly, Lal Ded considers the world as a web of traps for the unwary as long as one's own self remains amnesiac towards its nature.

Therefore, her poems make us realize that the world is a playful expression which is occupied with the sense of Divinity and the self and the divine are nothing but a single aspect which in turn results in the transportation of the soul from anguish and alienation to joyful recognition. This sense of oneness is something that helps the women of the dominating society to get liberated from her existential crisis and manage to survive herself in a patriarchal society.

Conclusion

Under the light of the above discussion, it can be very well comprehended that both Lal Ded, a poet of the medieval period and Sarojini Naidu, a poet of the pre-modern period of Indian literature in most of her poems have always tried to uphold her concern about the degradation of both women and nature. No matter how different their periods were their pains and agonies were all the same and they have tried to deal with the same concern of women

liberation and ecological development by viewing nature as a divine being which in turn sometimes also expressed the spiritual Ecofeminist or Ecomystical aspects of the Bhakti poetry. Whenever the theme of women is involved, Ded and Naidu are seen to use the instances from nature which in turn reveals her tendency to parallel women and nature, and this aspect makes us lead ourselves to deal with the theory of Ecofeminism in depth. This very aspect or theory that is often reflected deep within the lines of Naidu's poetry aims to achieve the long-term objective of attaining gender equality, and a sustainable development of the ecosystem. Ecofeminism through its concept and through its incorporation and contribution to literature aimed towards the proper development of the society and enlightened the common masses about the necessity of a proper treatment of women and their surrounding nature by giving her as well as all other biotic and abiotic components of the Earth equal place and a peaceful life in the society. Women fight for her rights every day and this combat to rise against her domination is only possible through "Prakriti" which is, as described by the famous Indian Ecofeminist Dr. Vandana Shiva, "the feminine principle as the basis for development which conserves is ecological. Feminism as Ecology, and Ecology as the revival of Prakriti—the source of all life" (Shiva 36). To end with the enlightening words of Priyanka Chanda who puts this very concept aptly stating that, "The disruption and transformation of the static dualism of nature and culture into a more dynamic and dialectical relationship between the two sides of the binary is pivotal to gender inclusiveness in terms of women's material position as (ecological) citizens and valuing women's (care) work which "naturally" links women to caring for the earth" (Chanda 3).

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