



# Literary Voice

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**Literary Voice**

**Editor : T.S. Anand**



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### *From the Editor's Desk*

The Waves unleashed by the irrepressible Covid 19 continue to trouble and torment human beings all over the globe but the human spirit and enterprise continues to thrive in spite of the contraries that assail it. We, in the *Literary Voice*, are striving to ensure the publication of the journal in time and mailing it to all the eligible members, albeit the complaints pour in regarding the late delivery at the destinations due to the tardiness in postal services. The current *Literary Voice: A Peer Reviewed Journal of English Studies* September 2021 comprises thought provoking and in depth interrogations on multiple nuances in the literary texts from the British, American, Afro-American, African, South Asian and Diaspora literatures, autobiographies and memoirs, Cinema and Web Series through the concepts of Memory Studies, Peace Studies, Medical Humanities, Intermediality, Transhumanism, Intertextuality, Ecofeminism, Ecocriticism, Theory of Trauma, Lacanian psychology, Raewyn Connell's Masculinities, Racism, Marginalization, Invisibility, the failure of the American dream and the birth of New woman in America/Africa.

The research investigations that range from the feminist revisionist mythology in literature and cinema- to Post-Truth politics- to Gilroy's theories, Dalits/Adivasis- to gender fluidities-to Utopian consciousness-to memory as bulwark against the trauma of Holocaust and the Partition. Specially, four texts by women writers reflect on the banality of evil that persists in despotic regimes of China, Dominican Republic, Russia and theocratic Iran, and causes individual as well as collective trauma to the people. The memoir of Holocaust survivor Ruth Klüger endeavours to emphasise that memoirs prove to be counter-monuments by creating literary chronotopes that are spatial and temporal indicators. Two Memoirs of the carcinoma afflicted create visual metaphors through their graphic pathographies and enable the reader to experience the tumultuous journey emerging out of cancer. In view of the recent violent turmoil in Afghanistan caused by the ascendancy of the Talibans and their diatribe against women, the article on *landays* (short oral poems sung by Afghan women) explores how *landays* are expressions of rebellion and subtle protests against the double mutilation that Afghan women face at home and in exile.

Apart from the research scholars' engagements with literary texts, the present edition of *LV* comprises an Interview with poet-scholar, Prof. Kul.Bushan.Razdan, Prof. Swaraj Raj's meditations on Sherry Turkle's *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With*, Book Reviews by Prof. Harish Narang, Dr. Purabi Panwar and Priyanka Bisht on Lalit Mohan Sharma's *Eyes of Silence*, Prof. Somdatta Mandal's translated *Manottama: Narrative of a Sorrowful Wife* and Dr. Shivani Salil's *Hiraeth: Partition Stories from 1947* respectively. We are glad to introduce Tapeshwar Prasad, Alapati. Purnachandra Rao, Ariful Islam Laskar (Bangladesh) and Ms. Surbhi Sharma as the new voices in English poetry.

The updates from the readers about our modest endeavours to enrich the journal, will be highly appreciated.

*T.S. Anand (Dr.)*

# Concepts of Love, Marriage and Sex in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*

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## *Abstract*

*This paper probes into the concepts of marriage, love and sex presented in Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet and demonstrates the tragic effect of erotic love concerned with only carnal desires and sexual fantasies. These issues are of significance to the play as they are present in every part of the world and become reality in every couple in love. The article examines the explicit use of sexual imagery and erotic conversations of the central characters like Lady Capulet, Romeo and Juliet. Sensible thinking and reasonable actions are not given any importance by the central characters. The main characters are involved in animal-like carnal desires for reproduction and unending sexual pleasure. Romeo, as a love addict, shifts his love from Rosaline to Juliet, but ultimately loves the idea of Love rather than any person. He is a victim of his uncontrollable emotion and degraded sentimentalism Juliet, given her young age, mistakenly chooses romantic love indulging in obscene sexual conversations over the everlasting filial love. Her love for Romeo is not strong enough to conjure him in her spiritual desolation to support her in her desperation. The play constitutes a cautionary tale to the young lovers who prioritise carnal desires over their relationships.*

*Keywords: carnal desire, erotic love, marriage, spiritual love, tragic fate*

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## **Introduction**

In this curiously lop-sided world, the whole age is in combination to drive sense and decorum out-of-doors. Sex, with all its connotations of physical pleasure, reigns supreme. The physical and the material are ever preferred before the moral and the spiritual. Marriage has the larger purpose of bringing together two individuals in a bond of love. However, in some cases, it is viewed as a commercial proposition, and as a means of sexual gratification, procreation and creature comforts. A primitive atmosphere with urgent primal instincts prevails, where chaos and superstition with sexual abnormality lead men's thoughts, speech, and action.

"Sex and morbidity are affirmed with renewed vigour during the Shakespearean age" (Mackenzie 22). *Romeo and Juliet* is an example of explicit use of sexual imagery and erotic conversations. "The age of Renaissance advocated a preference for spiritual love which was sacred and ennobling, and although the English poets accepted sensual love they professed scorn for lust" (Ma 920). As a corollary of the trends and practices of his time, Shakespeare depicts the tragic fate of two young people who were erotic and who gave importance to lust rather than spiritual love. As Shakespeare is appreciated for his "universal

themes” (Danner and Roselyn 87), and “everlasting relevance” (McEvoy 96), *Romeo and Juliet* portrays one such universal theme of love and sex.

With the opening of the first scene, we seem to suddenly enter into a world of the erotomaniacs. Even the unnatural hate threatens to get even by perpetrating sexual atrocities on the “yet a stranger to the world” (Shakespeare 1.2.8) women-victims of a calculated revenge. Womanhood is labelled in terms of fulsome femaleness alone. The servants, fearless and shameless, discuss with a certain indecent enjoyment, the loathsome proposition of the cutting off of the maiden heads of the maids of a society at par with their masters and superior to their own. Young men of education bred in higher circles, too, are affected by the same abnormal consciousness of sexual behaviour. They delve deep into the lowest recesses of imaginative sexual pleasures. Their most brilliant witty statements sparkle only to be destroyed by the dirty sexual statements. The taught and the untaught, the civil and the rude, the young and the old, the gallant and the cynic, man and woman, are all huddled together in the same immoral mass of obscenity. Shakespeare uses the literary device kitsch that is “trashy, vulgar and commercialized to posit male erotic fantasy as the dominant frame of reference” (Wells 914). The conventional virtue of chastity in Rosaline is a defect to love rhyming Romeo, since Rosaline “will not stay the siege of loving arms” (Shakespeare 1.1.203), “Nor ope her lap to saint-seducing gold” (Shakespeare 1.1.220). “It is romantic love with an intense attraction involving the idealisation of the other within an erotic context” (Jankowiak 1). Carnal desire, lust and love are all synonyms here.

### **Loose Talk of Lady Capulet on Love, Sex and Marriage**

“In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries the pattern of the society is that if a woman has to be accepted by the society, she needs to obey the decision of her father and cannot choose her own partner, but a man can make his decisions independently whether to enter a marriage or not and who to be his wife”(Kakkonen and Ana 22). Consequently, the woman in this strange under-developed and professedly Christian society is just a child-producing machine. Lady Capulet, too, contributes largely to the same view. Talking to her on the subject of her marriage, while the nurse is present, she assures Juliet, that at her age, “Here in Verona, ladies of esteem, / Are already made mothers” (Shakespeare 1.3.70-71), and quotes her own example as a mother to be followed by the daughter, “I was your mother much upon these years (Shakespeare 1.3.72).

It is the mother’s delicacy of feeling before a daughter that keeps Lady Capulet from indulging in obscene sexual talk. She allows the nurse to jabber on such indelicate remarks to persuade Juliet that she should not become less by marrying Paris as she would possess all that he had. Also to exhort Juliet to accept marriage, she says “Go, girl, seek happy nights; to happy days” (Shakespeare 1.3.106). All this shows clearly Lady Capulet’s attitude towards marriage and sex. She gives less importance to love as the women of her society. Even maiden modesty is mindlessly flouted by the ever-urgent femaleness of Juliet, when she speaks half to herself and half to the nurse after the nurse has told her that the gentleman in question was none other than Romeo, the only son of her great enemy. Then she immediately employs the usual female method of lying to draw her off the scent. It is also significant that in all her moods the central element that holds all else together is carnal desire. The lightest mood shows that sentimentally thrilled, she is so fascinated by the sexual implications that

she cannot speak a word, or a syllable. When she makes a comment, it is mouthed with the toss of the head and a smirk, in tune and in spirit of the nurse's last line, with which her own forms a true couplet "Wilt thou not Jule? It stinted and said 'ay' (Shakespeare 1.3.57) and at once Juliet's own rhyme dances along and falls in line "And stint thou, too. I pray thee, nurse, say I" (Shakespeare 1.3.58). Then through the half-light and half-grave mood of the twilight of her dawning love, she again moves to physical sex rather than Romeo. He is considered along with death as a mere accessory to its sensual activity: "Come cords; come, nurse; I'll do my wedding bed: / And death not Romeo, take my maiden head!" (Shakespeare 3.2.136-137).

### **Romeo's Attitude: Love for Love's Sake**

"The male characters present in Verona lack mature masculinity" (Aral 1). Romeo is not an exception. He is a victim of his uncontrollable emotion and degraded sentimentalism. Capulet's reference to Romeo as 'young,' and the way his friends address him or allude to him in his absence, confirms the impression that Romeo is a mere boy within his teens yet. "Romeo is not just emotionally immature; he is immature in his knowledge of the ways of the world" (Aral 9). He has reached an age where his emotional, intellectual and imaginative features focus on sex. It is the individual constitution at a particular stage of life that makes its demands for the fulfilment of the carnal desire. This is the hypnosis, which forms the mutual magnetic attraction between the sexes. In Romeo, therefore, the sexual instinct is almost ripe and urgent for self-fulfilment, but it is not controlled by any mature experience, or the more mature guidance of his elders, or with the habitually trained attitude to seek that guidance, or to accept it when it is offered.

It is, therefore, easy to see that when the strong stimulus of a physically beautiful woman presents itself to his senses, he is clean swept off his moral feet into the cesspool of irresistible carnality. He endlessly talks on, or walks about mum, or balks human society. Neither is he at home in the cheerful light of the day, nor at peace in the dawn, the sunset, or the darkness of the night. After restless nights he betakes himself, as Montague corroborates Benvolio, to the lonely sycamore grove, where he gives himself up to the misery of sentimental grief, initiated by a keen and lively imagination. But as soon as light begins to advance he slinks away home to his chamber by himself, and, "Shuts up his windows, locks fair daylight out, / And makes himself an artificial night" (Shakespeare 1.1.144-145).

Romeo, evidently, has the symptoms of one stricken with a nameless fear. He is habitually depressed, a hypochondriac of the 18th century born before his time. Hypochondriasis or the English Malady as it was called, results from a combination of nervous tension for one reason or another, superiority or inferiority-complex, and self-centred reserve. In Romeo we find a spiritual set saturated with high density emotion. It keeps him in a state of high nervous tension. He suffers from chronic inferiority complex. These two traits generate a third by their natural fusion, the sense of aloofness, mixed with a constant fear of intrusion. This results in self-centred reserve which tends to keep its own counsel. Romeo's stage of life at the time, therefore, is one of urgent predilection for sex, in which the larger element is that of lust of the body. Burning by its own internal fire, it lends heat to his whole being, so that he looks fiercely and fearfully about to find some object of sexual gratification.

Luckily, for him the first object that comes within his sexual purview is Rosaline, as charming as she is chaste. Mercutio makes fun of the so-called love of Romeo for her. He knows that Romeo is not really in love with Rosaline as he is a love addict. "Love addicts are never satisfied with any real lover, since the lover they seek is really their own unknown self who alone will provide a perfect fit" (Colman 512). So, he keeps on changing his lovers, but is never satisfied with anyone. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the friendship between Romeo and Mercutio is homoerotic attraction. The play is a fusion of heterosexual and homosexual elements (Lafontaine 20). This clearly proves that Romeo is a lover of love, not any human being. His attitude towards love can be summarized as love for love's sake, and love for sex's sake. For this reason, it is a tragedy of impetuous young love, and due to the wavering eye of Romeo, Juliet would soon become miserable when the next fair skin and fancy skirt diverts him (Weinberger 355). Romeo's erotic love is purely based on the physical beauty that he sees first in Rosaline and later in Juliet. The same initial letter in their names would be enough reason for Romeo to believe that they are made for each other. The fact is that he is in love with the feeling of being in love. "Ultimately, Romeo's eroticism leads him to love what he believes love promises more than he loves Juliet as an actual person" (Broyles 100). Mercutio's "The ape" acts correctly the very symptoms of true love with Rosaline as its object. He may be self-deceived but not so the shrewd and wary Rosaline. Montague's warning also fits in nicely here that Romeo is not a true counsellor to himself. Romeo's love-propensity, in consequence, during the period under review, has for its kernel, pure carnal desire or lust, and in no sense deserves the label of the rare and dignified sentiment of love. In *Romeo and Juliet*, there are two kinds of conflicts, the external and the internal. "The external conflict is between civic law and sexual desire. However, Romeo suffers from the inner conflict between a weak will-to-love and a strong death wish" (Panagopoulos 141). So, the hero loves the concept of love, not really Juliet or Rosaline: "This love feel I that feel no love in this" (Shakespeare 1.1.182).

Sentiment is a cluster of emotions that attaches itself to a person, a situation or an object. The genuineness and the duration of this relationship between two persons must essentially depend on the relative range, depth and intimacy of mutual knowledge. Romeo evidently does not possess this prerequisite. "Consequently, it is not surprising that where he is concerned, Rosaline has receded into her inviolate chastity. It is chastity that preserves Rosaline from death, and the desire for sex proves lethal for Romeo and Juliet" (Mackenzie 25). Rosaline knows quite well that in Romeo's profuse protestations of love there is too much of the fiery fleshy element of sex. It has for its core the lust of the eye which is as urgent as it is short-lived. After meeting Juliet, he gives Friar Laurence a most correct reason for giving up Rosaline: "I pray thee, chide not' she, whom I love now / Doth grace for grace and love for love allow; / The other did not so" (Shakespeare 2.3.85-87). The old sage, however, immediately comes to the just defence of Rosaline's attitude "O, she knew well / Thy love did read by rote and could not spell" (Shakespeare 2.3.87-88).

There is sufficient direct evidence on record to show that there is nothing whatever genuine in Romeo's so much bemoaned and berhymed love of Rosaline. His expression of love for Rosaline does not have strong foundation. First, when he reads her name in the list of Capulet's guests, it has aroused in him no emotion at all, as a matter of fact the label is meaningless, and devoid of any denotation whatever. Not until Benvolio reminds him "At this same ancient feast Capulet's / Sups the fair Rosaline, whom thou lov'st" (Shakespeare

1.2.87-88) does he embark upon his customary ecstatic inundation of hymning Rosaline's beauty, and his own vows of everlasting constancy, love and devotion. He maintains the apparent absurdity "One fairer than my love! The all-seeing sun / Ne'er saw her match since first the world begun" (Shakespeare 1.2.97-98). We are utterly dismayed at the speech gorging with superlatives, but in his next speech, we are reassured by its ring of sincerity. He is prepared to put his love for Rosaline to the never failing test of comparison: "I'll go along, no such sight to be shown, / But to rejoice in the splendour of mine own" (Shakespeare 1.2.105-106).

At the Capulet's ancient feast, our disillusionment is complete when we find that he has slipped into forgetfulness. He is utterly unaware of the purpose of his visit here to rejoice in the splendour of his own Rosaline. Instead of looking at Rosaline, his lustful eyes set on the feminine youth and beauty, Juliet. He begins to mumble her praises much in the same key and style as those of Rosaline before. It is noteworthy that his sentimental expressions are intermixed with the hushed notes of awestruck admiration as he sees Juliet in her romantic glory. Juliet also shows through the rigmarole of religious emotions, as he considers the sexual possibilities of the divine apparition before him, with something like regret "Beauty too rich for use for earth too dear!" (Shakespeare 1.5.51).

"Romeo moves from adolescence to maturity through marriage" (Aral 2). A change in him is clearly noticeable from lust to refined sentiment of pure love, but it takes time even with a partner of Juliet's calibre. For the beauty he refers to is still evidently the beauty of the female body alone. Consequently, the emotion roused by Juliet is as transitory as the stimulus itself, since it lends itself to nothing deeper than the skin probing carnal desire. "Love is, of course, more than a word. Like other sentiments, it is experienced and expressed in the acting out; something that happens within and between people" (Rebhun 96). In the case of Romeo and Juliet, the only love they experience, express, and act out is erotic love.

### **Juliet's Perspective of Love: An Escape from Helpless Condition to Sexual Pleasure**

"Madam, I am here / What is your will?" (Shakespeare 1.3.6). This speech seems to have been lisped by a tender aged child in a state of fearful repression. The simplicity, the directness and the economy of words that are its peculiar qualities indicate that it might have been spoken by a well-trained and overtaxed servant, living in an atmosphere of abnormal mechanical service. Lady Capulet's speech in response to Juliet's is quite in tune with the autocratic life of the family "Tell me, daughter Juliet. / How stands your disposition to be married?" (Shakespeare 1.3.64-65). The form of address "daughter Juliet" is a pointed reminder that she is expected to answer the question, as an obedient daughter in proper submission to the will of her elders. Juliet, too, is not taken, in by the seeming considerate and affectionate way Lady Capulet argues with her about the material advantages that would accrue from such a match. The whole speech is calculated to make Juliet fall in with the wishes of the speaker. And, the stage directions will have to bring this fact into relief by the tone, expression, gesture and action of Lady Capulet. The moment she finds herself crossed and denied the servile obedience she expects, she has no use for Juliet's promise of filial consideration in the matter "I'll look to like, if looking liking move; / But no more deep will I endart mine eye. / Than your consent gives strength to make it fly" (Shakespeare 1.3.97-99). The significance of the speech is the daring proposition of an equality of action, based

on the freedom of the will. This certainly could not have pleased a woman of Lady Capulet's temperament, in spite of the fact that it is completely concurrent with her own request, "What say you? Can you love the gentleman? / This night you shall behold him at our feast" (Shakespeare 1.3.79-80).

The truth in the play is that the mother and the daughter cleverly evade each other as a game. There is no confidence obtaining between the two. Capulet has stormed out on Juliet's refusal, leaving her in a state of helpless collapse with the unthinkable and dilemmatic choice between bigamous perjury and helpless homelessness. Juliet's fervent appeal to her mother for help and protection in her really helpless state fails to affect her mother. Juliet finds herself utterly alone forsaken by the gods, forsaken by man, forsaken by the mother, and driven to despair by the father. In her utter solitude, she becomes suddenly conscious of the futility and feebleness of her pigmy existence. Then with self-pity she says, "Alack, alack! That heaven should practise stratagems / Upon so soft a subject as myself" (Shakespeare 3.5.211-212).

In the state of homelessness, others might consider an escape by elopement. But in Juliet's case, it would mean merely going away with her own husband. Unfortunately, this side of the problem does not strike her at all, in spite of the alertness of her intellect, which is indicated by her deliberation on the other side of the problem. Her love for Romeo is really not strong enough to keep him in her spiritual desolation to support her in her desperation. The abnormal conditions of repressiveness under which Juliet has been brought up, has utterly stunted her nascent personality. Consequently, she does not possess the requisite mental equipment of thinking for herself. She is also at such an impressionable age that naturally all that has the sexual glitter is powerful and precious masculinity for her. At this particular stage of her life, Juliet lives ordinarily in an abnormally heightened emotional state. In a problematic situation, she would naturally be incapable of initiating and pursuing a reasoned course of action, her only guide being emotion to which she surrenders disregarding the consequences. She can only reason about things in the short run as when she argues in the Orchard-Scene about Romeo's perilous situation. Her overstrung heart, therefore, once moved by some strong stimulus, plunges straight into action before her mind really becomes aware of what is happening. Her heart does not consult her head for joint action. She gives importance for emotion and not for reason. Under the circumstances and with the quality of her character, Juliet can have no deeper loyalties. In this connection her lamentation over the banished Romeo is significant, for she says if the death of either, or both, of her parents had been added to the announcement of the death of Tybalt, it would have been fit cause to move modern lamentation, the all absorbing lamentation over the exile of Romeo.

Juliet's spiritual cast is devoid of the capacity of forming healthy sentiments, which give cohesion to the personality. Schuyler asks a question: "The test of Juliet's love comes when she must decide between her family and Romeo after Tybalt's death. She severs herself from her parents and then from her closest caregiver, the nurse. Is this growth from timid child to courageous woman-in-love in just two nights and two days believable?" (66). The answer to this question is obvious that she is filled with carnal desire. The sex impulse in her at the age of about fourteen in the southern climate is naturally urgent and keenly clamouring for self-gratification. One cannot help noting that she knows too little, where the details of the actual lovemaking are concerned. Sometimes her language becomes as



embarrassingly singly fulsome as when sex matter is innocently and ignorantly, but dangerously lisped by a child:

Take up those cords, Poor ropes, you are beguil'd,  
Both you and I, for Romeo is exil'd:  
He made you for a high way to my bed,  
But I, a maid, die maiden-widowed.  
Come, cords; come, nurse; I'll to my wedding-bed;  
And death, not Romeo, take my maidenhead! (Shakespeare 3.2.132-137)

The six lines soaked in sex, uttered in the teeth of maddening grief are significant. It is the god, Hymen wailing from the profundity of the Slough of Despond over the sudden suspension of his official privileges. The same idea of the virgin longing for sexual satisfaction is repeated full five times in six lines, with a poignancy of passion, which scarcely falls short of the actual coitus. All this is reminiscent of another occasion, the Balcony-Scene, when after the exchange of love-vows, Romeo still complains "O! Wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied?" (Shakespeare 2.2.125). And immediately and unhesitatingly Juliet asks him a question for a question, which implies the "how" rather than the "what" of the sexual satisfaction in so many words, as hungrily devouring each other, with blood racing in their veins, hearts pounding within each breast, dry-throated and dry-lipped, they foolishly, lustfully stare at each other. Juliet murmurs in a far-off whisper, "What satisfaction canst thou have tonight?" (Shakespeare 2.2.126).

The abnormal consciousness about sex in Juliet is initiated and enhanced by the two great factors of Heredity and the home environment with its continual sexual talk. Doncaster brings out clearly the fact of the operation of the principle of Heredity. "Not only bodily character, but also the mind is essentially determined by the hereditary endowment received from the parents. The circumstances determine the intellectual development, but the mind is irrevocably decided before the child is born" (49). Juliet, with natural, keen, continual sex stirrings and possessing large emotional capacity and a most lively imagination must necessarily have acute predilection for sex. This is clearly shown further by Juliet's remark about Paris in response to her mother's suggestion that she should look at Paris from the point of view of a prospective suitor at their feast that evening: "I'll look lo like if looking liking move" (Shakespeare 1.3.97).

The nurse's speech establishes Juliet's age by a fourfold landmark the earthquake, Juliet's weaning, Juliet's fall, and Lammas-eve. Perhaps, to the nurse the most remarkable event was the broad jest by her husband that attended the fall of Juliet. The nurse seems to be speaking to us as a visionary from the past and the future meeting in the realisation, as it were, of her husband's prophecy in the present. The feeling of self-elation transports her body into a deep trance. She is fascinated by her husband's vision of the present Juliet's sex consciousness whom he saw as a child eleven years ago. We certainly sense something of this phenomenon and catch the contagion of the nurse's fascination by the remark of her husband: "Thou wilt fall backward when thou hast more wit / Wilt thou not, Jule? It stinted and said "Aye" (Shakespeare 1.3.56-57). And the erotic receptivity in Juliet's emotional cast of stimulation from purely imaginative sexual situations, with the ardour of reality is further depicted in her reply to her mother's query: "Can you like of Paris' love?" (Shakespeare 1.4.102)

I'll look to like, if looking liking move;

But no more deep will I end art mine eye  
Than your consent gives strength to make it fly. (Shakespeare 1.3.97-99.)

We can almost see her eyes opening wide to narrow down to a look of self-scrutiny. Alex Comfort supports these findings with regard to the development of Juliet's character; "During these early phases (up to the age of 4 or 5), the child's pursuit of satisfaction (libido) is limited to the experience of its own body." He continues, "Freud's work suggests that in most individuals some or all of the infantile patterns persist within mating behaviour" (30). Thus, Shakespeare makes his point clearly and strongly that sexual desire devoid of love leads to tragedy.

## Conclusion

"Shakespeare's plays are classics as they address us straight even centuries after they were penned speaks volumes of their undimmed significance" (Subramanyam 3). *Romeo and Juliet* is significant in the sense that young lovers may take precautions before they fall in love and do not become a prey to sexual desires. In this connection, Solbeck conducted a study on young unmarried mothers of Mali who were victims of romantic love and carnal desires. These women lost their lovers as they were sexually involved at a very young age. As a remedy, Venezuelan soap opera, which resembles a modern version of *Romeo and Juliet* was shown to these women to drive home the point that involvement in sex and romantic love lead to tragedy for the young people (415).

Love is not just being erotic. The love between married couples should be more than erotic love. Of course, erotic love does not mean just sex either, rather it refers to the experience of being in love. "The paradox of erotic love is that although it always speaks the language of the eternal and the infinite, it is in reality always temporal and limited" (Colman 512). As Romeo and Juliet do not feel love, and as they have just sex in their erotic love, they experience tragedy.

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## Reflections of an Angry Playwright: David Storey's *Cromwell*

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### *Abstract*

*In many of the sources, David Storey's Cromwell is considered one of the historical plays of the post-war British Theatre. Yet it does not fit the traditional definition of historical drama as this play lacks realistic settings, chronological time and characters. Cromwell is unlocalized in time or place but only its title points that it is set in England during the Civil War. Also the time that passes during the course of the play is never specified. In Cromwell, the title character never appears; however, the purpose of Storey is to criticize the authoritarian oppression. Thus, the aim of this paper is to reveal David Storey's reaction against the oppressive government of the period while examining Cromwell from literary, social and historical perspectives.*

*Keywords: David Storey, Cromwell, history play, twentieth century English Drama, angry young playwrights.*

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The twentieth century is one of the most important and exciting periods in English drama as the playwrights of the period developed traditional genres and also expanded the subject-matter of the stage, so a variety of dramatic forms were created. The social changes resulting from two World Wars; the need for national reappraisal with the loss of Britain's imperial role, together with the effects of technological advances and increasing urbanization had a continuing creative impact on the theatre. As a result of new ideologies, playwrights found a new public voice with which to communicate (Innes 1).

In 1956, John Osborne's play, *Look Back in Anger*, started a new revolution. As a result of this, Osborne became one of the most important figures of the theatre in the 1950s. This play was seen as the statement of the new generation, who brought a new spirit to drama and culture in general. Osborne was one of the members of a group called the "Angry Young Men" (Barnes 174). The group consisted of a post-war generation of playwrights and novelists who were rebelling against society. The most important figures were John Osborne, Arnold Wesker and John Arden as playwrights and as novelists and poets Kingsley Amis, Philip Larkin and John Wain were examples of the group. They expressed scorn and disaffection with the established, socio-political order of the country. Their impatience and anger was especially aroused by what they perceived as the hypocrisy and the mediocrity of the upper and middle classes. They were intellectuals mostly of working class or lower-class origin. Some of them studied in the post-war red-brick universities at the expense of the state and very few were from Oxford. Their writings frequently expressed raw anger and frustration at the post-war reforms which failed to meet the expectations of the post-war

generation, which was angry and rebellious in nature (Luebering 245). Osborne's influence lasted until 1960s. Then, following John Osborne, Arnold Wesker, and John Arden, a second generation of "Angry Young Men" who were known as the "Second Wave" of the Royal Court group appeared in the 1960s. David Storey is one of them that can be classified in "angry" playwrights' category because of the subject matter of his plays.

Storey uses the genre of history play but as he does not fulfil all the requirements of a history play it can be said that his history plays are subverted ones. In his book, *The Contemporary British History Play*, as Palmer states the term historical play "is imprecise and generic boundaries are not easy to establish". The tradition started in ancient Greek and it became famous with Shakespeare's history plays in the Elizabethan period (Palmer 5-6). The Elizabethan history plays were written based on history or having a historical theme. The plays organized events to emphasize political, social, or religious lessons. Thus, they generally portrayed a political situation and used this situation to teach secular political theory. Also, the playwrights' aim was to show that past events could be drawn upon and they could serve as a guide to present behaviour (Ribner 33). History on the stage remained committed to the idea of the past as parable. In the nineteenth century, historians also conceived history as an objective fact without a necessary message and "the theatre bent itself to the positivists' call for realism" (Palmer 1).

In response to the new attitudes about history, in the later decades of the twentieth century, historical drama changed. Historians question both the ability and the need of history to maintain objectivity and for the service of political and intellectual purposes. David Storey is one of them who uses segments of British history and contemporary life as the subjects of his plays and *Cromwell* is one of them in which Storey uses the history for his own purposes. Cromwell, the Puritan leader in England's seventeenth-century civil war, is an important figure for whom several books have been written in the history of England (Rusinko 118). Although the play seems both a history and biographical play, the title character Cromwell never appears in the play. However, Storey's main concern by choosing the title of the play is to set the play in a location where the Civil War takes place. Thus, for Palmer Storey enables the audience to "see the Civil War through its impact on civilians and recruits, a major historical event presented in terms of its effect on everyday characters" (64). In his book, *The Plays of David Storey: A Thematic Study*, Hutchings compares *Cromwell* with other history plays like *A Man for All Seasons*, *Galileo* and *Luther*, and he says while the audience can expect a play like these, when they watch *Cromwell*, they can understand that this play is not based on well-known facts and biographical details (26). This is the reason why *Cromwell* is not a traditional history play.

In terms of setting, characters and language, Storey's *Cromwell* differs from other traditional history plays. The play is set in a bare place in an unknown time as Taylor describes: "Cromwell is deliberately unlocalized in time or place – one may say that it is England during the Civil War, but only the title points to that conclusion" (26). Cohn also writes about the setting: "Cromwell, a non-realistic play tenuously set in the English Renaissance. The jacket of the published play shows an etching of Oliver Cromwell, but the seventeenth century Puritan does not appear in Storey's play; nor is his name mentioned" (185). *Cromwell*, which stages opposing armies who cannot keep track of their leaders, consists of three acts. The play starts in a wood with the entrance of two Irish men, Logan and O'Hallaron. Later one by one, other characters enter the stage: a Welshman, the English

Proctor, and Mr. Chamberlain who recruits others for his unnamed army. Storey does not say anything about the place in his very short stage directions but the reader can understand it when Proctor mentions:

“Proctor: I saw him in the wood ... passing between the trees ... a kind of ...”  
(Act I Scene II p. 105).

While these characters are wandering through the wood, they find a coffin and after that moment, relatives of the dead man enter the stage one by one: an old man, a fool, a middle-aged woman Margaret and her daughter Joan. Then, they come across soldiers and along with the realization of the dead soldier in the coffin, each group starts fighting. In Act II, Proctor, who escapes from the fight, appears with Logan and O’Halloran and they are all in uniforms. He kills Morgan and takes the Irishmen to prison. While he is trying to find his army, he sees Joan and the idiot who give him bread and water. Proctor and Joan decide to start a new life together. In the final act, they are seen as a couple with a child, but as they have no desire to live, at the end Proctor and Joan go into darkness on the ferry.

Storey tells the story in three-acts which consist of very short seven or eight scenes. Between Act II and Act III unspecified number of years pass. In terms of his dramatic structure, Storey himself remarks that “the only model for *Cromwell* was Shakespeare” (qtd. in Hutchings 30). Then, Hutchings comments on the reasons why the structure is similar to Shakespeare’s:

The brief scenes that constitute each act are presented with only the most essential props, and although the light fades at the end of each scene, neither the amount of time that has elapsed between any two events nor the total time that passes during the course of the play is ever specified. (30)

Storey’s play also is compared with Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* in terms of their settings, characters and unclear conclusions. In both plays the setting is not clear and time is not mentioned. Also, there is not much information about the characters. In his essay entitled ‘Insanity and the Rational Man in the Plays of David Storey’, Albert E. Kalson suggests that in *Cromwell*, there is a Beckett-like world in which

two garrulous Irishmen, sounding much like Didi and Gogo, serve as a chorus throughout... Like Beckett’s characters existing in a void, Storey’s characters in *Cromwell* are trapped in the limbo-like world of a bare stage. The play’s opening is an obvious echo of *Waiting for Godot*... (qtd. in Hutchings 31).

In addition, in terms of an uneventful and plotless play, off-stage events, long silences and with great number of characters Storey resembles Chekhov. In the Chekhovian tradition the causes of events are less important than their consequences and their impact on the characters’ lives. Indeed, the beginning and ending of events is not a matter of concern. Also, in Storey’s *Cromwell* like in Chekhov’s plays, there are off-stage events. There is always an important event but this event cannot be shown on the stage or it is not realized. There are also long silences and pauses in *Cromwell* which are written in the stage directions: “A pause, Margaret and Joan come in, separately, silent: heads bowed, dishevelled” (Act I Scene VII p. 134). What’s more, like Chekhov, Storey uses a great number of characters who are ordinary men. By using ordinary men, Storey has a chance to use everyday speech which makes the play universal. Lastly, Storey applies Brecht’s ‘dramatic parables’. A ‘Parable play’ is a dramatic form “defined as an allegorical or moral tale designed to illustrate an abstract principle by a concrete instance and is not necessarily restricted to the historical

period in which is set" (Hutchings 33). In order to convey his message easily, Storey prefers using parables.

By creating such a play, with the dramatic form in which the influence of important playwrights is obvious, Storey's aim is to criticize society in which there are conflicts between individuals and community and authority. Storey himself states the main point of his play: "The main point of *Cromwell* was that it has become immaterial which side you choose to be on. Political decisions make men destroy the values which they are ostensibly defending" (qtd. in Cohn 186). Using a historical figure in the play is also used for this criticism. Storey writes the play during the Vietnam War and in the play, by uttering the name of the Puritan leader Cromwell, he implies there is Civil War and its effects are reflected through ordinary characters. Storey reveals his idea in an interview:

The play took shape when Vietnam and Northern Ireland were at their heights. I wrote it towards the end of 1968 and the beginning of 1969. I felt that there was no position you could take up in the face of those events. The main point of *Cromwell* was that it has become immaterial which side you choose to be on. Political decisions make men destroy the values which they are ostensibly defending. (qtd. in Hutchings 39)

Storey wants to show the conflict that was caused by the war. In her book, *British Drama 1950 to the Present*, Rusinko comments:

Storey concentrates on various characters on both sides of the conflict, who at times seem ignorant or confused by the issues. The loss and confusion people feel during a war situation is sometimes expressed in antiphonal chanting, a stylistic means by which the author articulates and shapes the random nature of the suffering. (118)

As soon as the play starts, when Morgan enters the stage, he informs the audience that there is fighting going on:

Morgan: Always fighting.

Logan: What?

O'Halloran: What's that?

Logan: Fight you, young man, if you don't watch out.

(Act I Scene I p. 101)

Later, the audience is informed that this fighting has been going on all day by Chamberlain.

"Chamberlain: I had. It was shot away ... There's been fighting in the woods all day. I'm surprised you haven't heard" (Act I Scene III p. 108).

There is no one in the village left as a result of the war so the characters are represented in a bare wood with a cart on a road, a ruined farmhouse and a burning farm. Joan describes the scene:

Joan: The soldiers came back an hour later...By then, my grandfather had been fastened in his coffin ... It would have broken his heart to see the things they took ... The cattle ... They dug the fields ... took all the roots ... there was nothing left ... That night we set off for a priest ... and found he'd fled ... We've been walking ever since ... A week: it must be more ... At first we had some food ... and then ...everywhere we went burnt fields, houses, even churches left in ruins...(Act I Scene V p. 121)

These are all striking images of the destruction of war represented through creating a bare place and hopeless characters. They do not have a place to stay and they do not have food to

be fed. In the wood, the characters also wonder how they can find food to be fed. Storey wants to show that each character urges survival in the play but although there is a group of people, each of them acts individually.

Proctor (to Chamberlain): Will we be fed do you think tonight?

*No answer: Chamberlain is looking off, preparatory to leaving.*

Will we be fed, do you think, sir, when we reach this place tonight? (Act I Scene III p 109-110)

Like Proctor, other characters frequently ask the same question about food and also they wonder where they are going. Their journey, starting in the wood and continuing after that, symbolizes life itself. To live and survive they have to move constantly. However, they cannot help feeling hopeless and desperate in many cases. This is the reason why they want to see the end of the war:

Proctor: I'm tired of war... We travelled to a place, I thought, where men took sides with words, not swords.

Wallace: There is no such place.

Drake: No words stake out their claim but swords are not drawn up behind. (Act II Scene IV p. 159)

What they want is a better world and a lighter place, but unfortunately even though they want to create their hopeful and peaceful world, they fail. Storey emphasizes the idea that there are no winners in the military battle. For instance, Joan and Proctor start a new life by establishing a family but their new life in which they have their child and their farm is taken from them when the troops arrive looking for the insurrectionists. "Even the spirit battle is failure; debate over political or spiritual reform between Proctor and Cleet the insurrectionist is resolved by the arrival of troops, not by reasoned discourse" (Troxel 34). Behind all these events, there is a dominant authority who is a British general. Although this general never appears on the stage, his control over the military, political and economic life of an occupied Ireland is felt. As "The Big One", he represents the brutalization of a native population by a superior military invader. As an "Englishman", he stands for the historical usurper of Irish rights.

Proctor: Aye... but see new masters take up the things they won ... new towns, new farms, new forts... new troops – old troopers with fresh harness on.

Joan: Let leaders lead: direct us as they will – support the good, and fight against the ill ... what can't be taken is our work ... our life, like theirs, is forfeit in the end.

(Act III Scene VI p. 177)

In their dialogues, there is a direct reference to the powerful ones like "The Big One". It is the capitalist system which is the dominant idea and it controls everything. So in such a world the characters try to find the light in order to survive.

In conclusion, *Cromwell* which is regarded as a history play of the twentieth century post-war British theatre reflects the situation of the contemporary world. David Storey shows his talent in using his literary skills by combining his historical knowledge to show the problems of contemporary society. In the symbolic play, history is used as the base of the play. In terms of historical reality, it does not reflect the exact history but in terms of universality, with its universal theme, the play shows the reality. In the play Storey draws a society which is full of problems. There seems to be no hope but it is possible to say that Joan and Proctor can go to a 'lighter' place.



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## Word as a Site of Conflict in Jane Austen's *Lady Susan*

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### *Abstract*

*This paper examines the two Words prevalent in Jane Austen's novella, Lady Susan, where one tries to gain dominance over the other. It is unclear as to which one is stronger, since Lady Susan experiences defeat only when dragged into the discourse of Mrs Vernon, i.e. the discourse of the phallogratic order, which very predictably puts her at a disadvantage. It is explored whether her words present Lady Susan to the reader as a villain and whether the word of Mrs Vernon is more reliable than that of Lady Susan's. Lady Susan's precarious position in the society and her tendency to act in her self-interest has led to her character being categorised as the 'Merry Widow' bearing the brunt of all the evil in the novella, which may not necessarily be true.*

*Keywords: Jane Austen, Lady Susan, Word, Narrative, Discourse.*

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Jay Arnold Levine suggests that *Lady Susan* is the “culmination of the earlier phase of literary burlesque” (24) and that Lady Susan as a character has to be seen in the context of “the more immediate predecessors of Lady Susan, particularly those in the eighteenth-century literature most familiar to Jane Austen” (24). Within this investigation of the character of the Merry Widow, Levine neatly maps out the three categories: “The widow in this body of fiction maybe (1) a poor pathetic figure, (2) a foil or confidante for the heroine... or (3) the villainess” (25-26) and his intention is clear when he calls the third category “pertinent to this discussion of Lady Susan” (26). Lady Susan is to bear the brunt of all the evil in the novella.

As a research piece from 60s, it is predictable to find Levine taking a stance (against Lady Susan of course) that has been made available to him by previous studies. It is still, however, a prevalent practice to view Lady Susan as an “adulterous, scheming, and dangerously entertaining protagonist” (Gaston 405) and to present the plot as a single-handed manipulation of events:

Lady Susan as she negotiates the suspicions of her sister-in-law, Catherine Vernon, seduces Mrs. Vernon's brother, Reginald De Courcy, and attempts to marry her own daughter Frederica off to the ridiculous Sir James Martin – all while trying to present herself as a decorous widow, and despising almost everyone (Gaston 405).

A poststructuralist perspective, on the other hand, would offer the villain the same space (or Word) as the heroine to be read and examined, something which Austen has offered in the form of “varying personal viewpoints” (Pinion 72).

The two main Words juxtaposed in the novella are those of Lady Susan and Mrs Vernon. Lady Susan's Word is a narrative of grief and struggle, with attempts to gain power through infiltrating the family, whereas Mrs Vernon's Word is a narrative of agitation and hate. The former seems to give the impression that she is the target of other female characters and in fact the society in general, whereas the latter is always engaged in the passive act of perception, venting her spite to her mother. The choice of word ‘passive’ is of the utmost importance here. While Lady Susan is constantly planning, explaining and making excuses for her behavior, the other Word is restricted to one of passive observation, heavily relying on the observer's self-proclaimed powers of perception. The former is always looking for an opportunity to renarrate her narrative and is filled with an enormous amount of energy, almost bordering on restlessness. She also looks for listeners for her story and establishes connections; marrying her daughter to Sir James is at least partly motivated by the desire for strong connections. The tone of their narratives is different too: the former adopts a familiar, explanatory and descriptive tone, freely admitting praise where necessary.

Their letters are also very strategically placed one after the other to keep the reader abreast of their reality, for it is clear that both characters have an entire reality sketched in their minds, which in turn is sketched on paper. My argument is that there is no one prevalent word that the author supports; instead the two Words are out for play, contesting with each other to be seen as the ultimate true Word. And as the Foucauldian discourse would have it, Truth is nothing but the dominant discourse, the discourse that gains power. Both parties are engaged in a battle for power, where one competes with intelligence and the other with perception. Both positions claim to have intimate knowledge of the other, according to which they act. Lady Susan is more proactive, although her actions are as pre-stated, executed with words, whether it is in planning or in enacting.

Mrs Vernon uses her perception and social knowledge to persuade her parents of Reginald and Lady Susan's growing connection. She knows she has an edge however, because of the word transpiring in London against her. But that is not all; it is not entirely social knowledge that has her in a guarded relationship with her sister-in-law. Mrs Vernon is in possession of two facts that Lady Susan herself admits to be true: first, she played a major role in preventing the marriage of Mr Vernon to Mrs Vernon and second, she prevented the sale of Vernon Castle to Mr Vernon. Her reasons, however, seem extremely personal and often explicitly reflected in her bitter tone. While Mrs Vernon holds on to events of past, Lady Susan explains these away in a sentence or two, preferring to stay in the present or planning the future:

To be sure when we consider that I *did* take some pains to prevent my brother-in-law's marrying her, this want of cordiality is not very surprizing, and yet it shows an illiberal and vindictive spirit to resent a project which influenced me six years ago, and which never succeeded at last. (Austen 8-9)

It would be fair to conclude then that Mrs Vernon's opinion cannot be objective as she has enough reasons to dislike her and therefore, her guarded relationship and prepossessed opinion seem logical. Although Mrs Vernon tries to adopt a tone of evaluation or objective assessment, her praise of Lady Susan is seldom well-meaning or free of censure.

It is almost, in every incident, followed by a disclaimer stating that the praiseworthy qualities might be a result of deceit or artifice:

Her address to me was so gentle, frank, and even affectionate, that, if I had not known how much she has always disliked me for marrying Mr. Vernon, and that we had never met before, I should have imagined her an attached friend.... I am sorry it is so, for what is this but deceit? Unfortunately, one knows her too well. She...talks very well, with a happy command of language, which is too often used, I believe, to make black appear white. (Austen 11)

The author is only too happy to promote the idea of that only women detect women's designs, not men. It is as if Austen makes one believe that women are clever enough in deception as well as in the detection of deception. Mrs Vernon convinces her mother that she "knows her too well" (Austen 11), by sharing her designs, intimate workings of mind, and her entire course of relationship with Frederica and Reginald as well as the Mainwarings. We never see her in any letter using the terms, "assume" "perhaps" "probable" and so on (although Lady Susan does) when it comes to Lady Susan. She has in her own terms a "resentful heart" (Austen 11) which searches for validation in its resentment. Quite delighted to see Reginald deriving amusement from Lady Susan's visit at first, she is satisfied, only to lose her brother to Lady Susan's good graces. Defeated, she finds another ally in Frederica, finding her an exact contradiction of her mother in all respects. Frederica is an ally who Lady Susan very cunningly observes "will never eclipse her" for Mrs Vernon "dearly loves to be firm, and to have all the sense and all the wit of the conversation to herself" (Austen 33).

It is perhaps to this end that Mrs Vernon presents Lady Susan as a bad mother. Although she and Reginald rely on Mr Smith for an account of her inappropriate behaviour at Mainwarings and use it as a pincushion to uphold her notorious reputation, they easily dismiss the same source when it comes to forming Frederica's reputation: "I am glad to find Miss Vernon does not accompany her mother to Churchill[sic], as she has not even manners to recommend her; and, according to Mr. Smith's account, is equally dull and proud" (Austen 8). However, when Frederica arrives, Mrs Vernon expresses such concern for the girl she had previously been relieved to not receive at Churchill. In her opinion, Lady Susan's reaction to Frederica's arrival with her uncle is "so ostentatious and artful a display has entirely convinced me that she did in fact feel nothing" (Austen 29). She believes that even though Lady Susan is her mother, she has "no right to make you unhappy" followed by an emphatic "she shall NOT do it" (Austen 44). It is as if Mrs Vernon is trying to taking away the right to be a mother from Lady Susan.

Mrs Vernon wishes for distance between the mother and daughter, fearing her to be a bad influence on such a young girl, however, she does not refrain from commenting on the "successive springs her ladyship spent in town, while her daughter was left in Staffordshire to the care of servants, or a governess very little better" (Austen 10-11). This, then, showcases the faulty reasoning of Mrs Vernon: first, she condemns Lady Susan for staying away from her daughter, which in fact should have made Frederica the exact opposite of her mother and second, when Lady Susan is actively supervising her daughter, everything appears to Mrs Vernon artificial and unnecessary. It is unclear whether Mrs Vernon thinks the daughter better off with or without her mother. However, one thing is clear in her conflicting opinions of Frederica- she changes it in accordance with an attempt to rationalize her opinion of Lady Susan as a bad mother. Who (What), then, is a good mother, or a good

woman, in Mrs Vernon's opinion and what is the "path of propriety" (Austen 11) that she is supposed to follow?

George Savile in his famous conduct piece states that not discharging her duties such as "the *Government of your House, Family, and Children*" (21) may subject the woman to "*Censure*, which will be a much heavier thing than the trouble you would avoid" (21). Mrs Vernon's representation of the phallographic order and her model of propriety/conduct is influenced and in fact, framed on the whole by this very prevalent moral code. However, what Mrs Vernon tries to achieve is more intricate than ousting Lady Susan as a villainess trying to wreak havoc everywhere she goes; Mrs Vernon attempts to eliminate competition by trying to portray Lady Susan as the improper woman, who is unworthy of entering her proper household (or any household in general) and hence cannot be relied upon, especially *over* her. The difference is minor but the intention is insidiously singular: Mrs Vernon does not implement the prevalent moral code to avoid notoriety; she uses the moral code to weaken Lady Susan's narrative and establish her own superiority. In a manner, both women use the moral code as a means to their selfish ends, the implementation or breach of morality has nothing to do with the institution of morality as such. The winner in this discursive conflict cannot be determined, because, as Mary Poovey remarks, neither is the "energy inherent in the female desire" unleashed, nor is the morality that Mrs Vernon uses to control her narrative lucrative, for it "destroys the individual and threatens society itself" (174).

If one is to address the subsequent loss of Lady Susan (considering one knows what it that she truly desires in the first place<sup>i</sup>) it is not because her discourse or her Word is inadequate or lacking in some respect. It is because by attempting to infiltrate the discursive sphere (the sphere of the patriarchal family) she lands herself in the very midst of that discourse, making herself a subject. Had she been outside of that sphere, it would be possible to use her disruptive powers to topple it. Lady Susan is paradoxically defeated by the discourse she attempts to manipulate and resist at the same time but ends up being a casualty of the same by her effort to affect a position of subservience<sup>ii</sup>. This abrupt withdrawal of Lady Susan from the society leaves something to be desired, and is perhaps a result of authorial anxiety in being able to capture the disruptive excess. Austen does not allow Lady Susan to completely lose face either, she still possesses "easy and cheerful affection...(and) No remembrance of Reginald, no consciousness of guilt, gave one look of embarrassment; she was in excellent spirits, and seemed eager to show at once by ever possible attention to her brother and sister her sense of their kindness, and her pleasure in their society" (Austen 69).

However, Lady Susan witnesses the same result as that of Austen's other heroines: marriage. While other heroines find respect in this institution, Lady Susan manages to reconstitute her status in the society that had ousted her, even if temporarily, in the form of an unsuspecting and well connected husband, Sir James. Even in this, the author is careful to maintain the heroine's need for keeping up appearances instead of the usual romantic happiness that Austen heroines (or Lady Susan's own daughter) seek throughout the novel. The narrator expresses her opinion in an ambiguous fashion: "Whether Lady Susan was or was not happy in her second choice, I do not see how it can ever be ascertained; for who would take her assurance of it on either side of the question?" (Austen 70). Even though she is able to reclaim the domestic space by locating an alternate site of power and perhaps, a site she had been meaning to claim from the very beginning, does that necessarily mean that

her victory or defeat is accompanied by happiness or lack thereof? Since the narrator refuses to indulge and the critic refuses to entertain the likelihood of Lady Susan's happiness, "[t]he world must judge from probabilities" (Austen 70).

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### Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> Her desires and intentions are mutable, however well organized they may be.

<sup>ii</sup> When Morrison says, "conduct books simultaneously demonstrate methods by which women writers could successfully evade masculine discourse's limitations from within its boundaries", she fails to extend the argument to the women who craft their narrative on a daily basis and leaves subversive powers to the authors (203).

**Understanding the Text: An Intertextual Reading of Muriel Spark's  
*The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie***

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*Abstract*

*Intertextuality may appear as a modern term, but the conception of its idea has existed since time immemorial. It marks its significance in the postmodern age. Postmodernism denotes a period post World War II, i.e. mid to late twentieth century; a movement in the realm of art, architecture, literature, philosophy, and criticism. Coined by Julia Kristeva, the term intertextuality indicates that a text cannot exist in isolation and reflects the influence of other literary texts. A text displays glimpses of the past texts by making direct references or allusions. In this context, the present research paper discusses the concept of intertextuality as a literary theory and explores the elements of intertextuality along with allusions and references incorporated by Muriel Spark in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. It reveals that the idea of intertextual reading enables the readers to conceive the detailed analysis and thereby help them to interpret the text.*

*Keywords: postmodern, intertextuality, allusion, author, text, reader, interpretation.*

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**Introduction**

Postmodern literature encompasses all the literary outputs written post the Second World War, exhibiting writing traits such as pastiche, metafiction, intertextuality, fragmentation, magic realism, fabulation, and paranoia. Thus, it is imperative to have a clear understanding of the writing techniques of the age. It is a common practice among avid readers to establish a connection between the multifaceted aspects of any reading text, and at the same time to connect the text with other texts that the reader has read previously. The association built using acquired knowledge between multiple texts guides the readers to develop a deep understanding of the text.

Intertextuality aims at forming a new relationship between a text and a reader. The author employs excerpts from other literary works that the reader can conceive a new meaning out of it. Intertextuality, therefore, disseminates a fresh flavor of interpretation to the original text through the reference made to other classical texts. It has rendered the readers with a degree of free interpretation of the work.

## Kristeva's Theory of Intertextuality

The idea of intertextuality dominates the postmodern age of writing. Julia Kristeva (1941) is considered the originator of the theory of intertextuality. She is a Bulgarian-born French philosopher and theorist of language and literature. The most important of Kristeva's early essays is the study of Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination*, which influenced Kristeva's introduction of the term intertextuality as a concept. Derived from the Latin term *intertexto*, intertextuality implies 'intermingle while weaving.' Officially, Kristeva used the term in two of her essays entitled *Word, Dialogue and Novel* in 1966 and *The Bounded Text* in 1967.

"Intertextuality, in its broadest sense, is a poststructuralist, deconstructionist and postmodernist theory that changed the concept of text, recognizing it as an intertext owing to the interrelations between texts and texts' absorptions of other texts" (Zengin 300).

Intertextuality denotes the inter-relationship and the interdependence of literary texts with the works of the past. Therefore, the reader's self-learned and previously gained knowledge, experience, and cultural formation act as determining intertexts. According to *The Dictionary of Critical Theory*,

intertextuality is essentially a mosaic of references to or quotations from other texts; a text is not a closed system and does not exist in isolation. It is always involved in a dialogue with other texts. It is not simply a matter of influences which pass from one author to another, but of the multiple and complex relations that exist between texts in both synchronic and diachronic terms. 'Influence' is simply one mode of intertextuality. (204)

A text establishes various connections with other literary texts of the past belonging to a diverse subject area. "Any text is the absorption and transformation of another. Intertextuality denotes a transposition of one or several sign systems into another or others" (Cuddon 367). "Transposition" is a Freudian term, here Kristeva "is pointing not merely to the way texts echo each other but to the way that discourses or sign systems are transposed into one another – so that meanings in one kind of discourse are overlaid with meanings from another kind of discourse" (367). It is a type of "new articulation."

Kristeva synthesizes elements from a heterogeneous group of thinkers as Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Mikhail M. Bakhtin, Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes to formulate her theory on intertextuality. Like any influential idea, intertextuality has undergone constant changes, and theorists have come up with multiple interpretations of it. Many other theorists such as Umberto Eco, Jacques Derrida, Harold Bloom, Michael Riffaterre and Gérard Genette fabricated it and added new dimensions to the understanding of this theory.

Intertextuality is a literary device inflicted by intertextual figures such as quotations, allusions, calque, translations, references, pastiche and parody. It is further divided into two categories - referential and typological intertextuality. Referential intertextuality refers to the use of fragments in the texts and typological intertextuality signifies the use of pattern and structure in typical texts. "Allusion is a passing reference, without explicit identification, to a literary or historical person, place, or event, or to another literary work or passage" (Abrams and Harpham 12). It involves direct reference of a character or quoting a line from another text. It can be derived from multiple sources – biblical, historical, mythical and literary.



Intertextuality and the intertextual relations between two or more texts operate at three levels. The levels of intertextuality depend upon various factors – the intention of the writer, the significance of the reference and the prior knowledge and memory of the reader. These are obligatory, optional and accidental. Obligatory intertextuality is a deliberate/intentional effort on the part of the writer. Optional intertextuality is not mandatory and has a lesser impact on the interpretation of the text. The prime objective of using optional intertextuality is to pay respect or to provide due credit to the original writers. Accidental intertextuality occurs when a writer has no deliberate intention of making any intertextual reference and allusion, but it happens when a reader may bring out similarities in two different texts.

### **Intertextuality in Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie***

Muriel Spark (1918-1961) is among the leading modern British writers of the twentieth century, remembered for her sheer excellence and originality. Her literary output is remarkable; her early novels received modest success but, with *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, she attained fame and glory at the International platform. There are various literary references, allusions and biblical quotations in the novel. It carries latent meaning, which exemplifies the interpretation of the text.

In the novel, direct allusions are made twice to the lyrical ballad *The Lady of Shalott* by Lord Alfred Tennyson. The lines have been taken from parts III and IV of the poem. Firstly, during Miss Brodie's lecture, where, Sandy recites the lines from Tennyson's poem. She is famous for her vowel sounds that enrapture Miss Brodie.

She left the web, she left the loom,  
She made three paces through the room,  
She saw the water-lily bloom,  
She saw the helmet and the plume,

She looked down to Camelot. (PMJB 7)

Secondly, Miss Brodie recites these lines to her class before dismissing them. Sandy listens to Miss Brodie attentively. "She is never bored as she has to lead a double life of her own in order to never be bored" (PMJB 21).

In the stormy east-wind straining,  
The pale yellow woods were waning,  
The broad stream in his banks complaining,  
Heavily the low sky raining  
Over towered Camelot;  
Down she came and found a boat  
Beneath a willow left afloat,  
And round about the prow she wrote

The Lady of Shalott. (PMJB 21)

Sandy inquires to herself, "By what means did your Ladyship write these words?" The Lady replies that it was done with a pot of paint which had been left behind by 'some heedless member of the Unemployed.' Sandy expects something better says, "Alas, and in all that rain!" *The Lady of Shalott* illustrates the solitude and isolation of a woman living an imprisoned life in a tower. She is unable to live her life freely because of a curse, as she is

unaware of the effects of it. Sandy too resembles the life of Lady of Shalott, as she also leads a double life under the influence of Miss Brodie. Sandy desires to live independently, but she is constantly being deprived of independence on account of Miss Brodie's callous attitude. The Lady of Shalott is an integral part of Sandy's fantasy life. She imagines Lady of Shalott placing her hands on her and whispering words into her ears. The incorporation of these lines also reflects upon the future life of Sandy, when she converts herself as a nun and joins a strict religious order and remains isolated. Like Lady of Shalott living in 'four grey towers' on a 'silent isle', she too leads a secluded life.

"Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness." (PMJB 12) These are the opening lines of John Keats's ode '*To Autumn*.' Miss Brodie narrates these lines during her lecture. She is a progressive teacher, who is not confined to the curriculum. During her class, she shares her love life with the girls. She tells them about her lover Hugh Carruthers to whom she was engaged. He dies at the young age of twenty-two during the First World War. *Ode to Autumn* is among the last major works written by Keats, soon after which he meets an immature death. By alluding to Keats's Ode, Miss Brodie compares the death of her beloved Hugh who, 'fell like an autumn leaf' at a very tender age to the early death of Keats. The opening lines suggest that Autumn is a season that represents change is inevitable. Change is constant whether it is for good or bad. It is a calm season, but quite thoughtless in the changes it brings. Similarly, the autumn season brings a sea-change in the life of Miss Brodie who loses her loved one and accepts it with calmness. The ode itself laments the death, the change that takes place and the transient nature of life. Meanwhile, the setting of the novel depicts the autumn season.

The novel represents the duality of life through the characters of Miss Brodie and Sandy Stranger. Sandy Stranger, one of the girls of Brodie set, faces duality in life. From an early age, to avoid the dull routines of her life, she engages in imaginary conversations with literary characters such as Lady Shalott, Alan Breck Stewart from Robert Louis Stevenson's novel *Kidnapped*, Mr Rochester from Charlotte Bronte's novel *Jane Eyre*. She is the confidante of Brodie – closest to her and her spy. Sandy loves Miss Brodie but develops hatred towards Brodie's teachings and ideologies. She tries to please her till a certain age but towards the end, betrays her teacher. Stranger, her surname, acts as a clue because, throughout the novel, she remains secretive and mysterious to Miss Brodie. Sandy's internal struggle to subdue the incessant polarity in life through escaping from the unpleasant realities to her pleasing world of imagination is evident in the novel through various events in the story.

For instance, when the school's heating system fails due to which all other students depart for their respective homes, Miss Brodie decides to take her set for a long walk to the old parts of Edinburgh. Sandy accompanies Mary Macgregor. She has been reading Robert Louis Stevenson's *Kidnapped* for a long time. During the walk, to flee from the current reality, she starts having her imaginary conversation with Alan Breck Stewart. The character of Alan is striking and appealing to her. Alan in Stevenson's novel has a heroic role. He is a 'dashing rogue', young adventurer and a skilled swordsman. He is a loyal Catholic. Alan teaches David about survival and gives him a new perspective on the often scorned Highlanders. He is clever but calmly assesses the situation and accordingly reacts to it. He is the most intriguing character in *Kidnapped* and the one who most contributes to its adventurous nature. From his first appearance to the last, he remains an entertaining and

essential aspect of the book. Similarly, Sandy also plays an integral part in the novel. Somehow, the character of Alan resembles Miss Brodie. Sandy makes a comparison between the fictional hero and her teacher. Alan has a profound influence over David Balfour. Preciously, Miss Brodie also has a life-changing impact on her set. In Sandy's imagination, Alan Breck asks her to take a message on his behalf to which she replies, "I shall never fail you, Alan Breck. Never." (PMJB 29) However, towards the end, she fails and betrays Miss Brodie. Later, Sandy also writes an invitation to Alan Breck and imagines having a moment full of passion and love.

Sandy's other fictional fantasies often point out her own desire to indulge in sexual relations. Sandy done with Alan Breck changes her liking towards the character of Mr Edward Fairfax Rochester, the Byronic hero of Charlotte Bronte's novel *Jane Eyre*. Sandy compares the face of Miss Gaunt to the housekeeper in *Jane Eyre*. (PMJB 58-59) In the novel, Jane is plain-looking in her appearance. She is passionate, determined and holds strong will. She also yearns for freedom and independence. She is ten at the beginning of the novel, and nineteen or twenty at the end of the main narrative. Similarly, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* also reflects the characteristics of Bildungsroman as it covers the story of six ten-year-old girls from their childhood to adolescence stage. Like Jane Eyre, Sandy is also an unattractive girl with her 'small piggy eyes.' Rochester marries Jane irrespective of her looks. Likewise, Teddy Lloyd, the art teacher rejects Rose Stanley 'famous for sex' to have an affair with Sandy, whom he calls "the ugliest little thing I've ever seen in my life." (PMJB 102) As the novel progresses, Sandy leaves the idea of fantasizing about all the heroes of fiction and 'falls in love with the unseen policewoman who questions jenny.' (PMJB 67) Later, when she attains maturity, she stops her imaginary conversations but leads a life of a divided personality.

Another allusion has been taken from James Hogg's poem *Bonnie Kilmeny*. Miss Brodie uses veiled allusions and expressions to discuss sex with her set. She says about her warrior lover "he was a pure man." (PMJB 38) She also describes it to her class 'Kilmeny was pure as pure could be.' She further adds, "Which is to say, she did not go to the glen in order to mix with men." These lines appear twice in the first stanza of the poem. By narrating these lines, she intends to show her beloved Hugh's pureness and fidelity. In the poem, Bonnie Kilmeny is portrayed as a fair maiden and a 'virgin in her prime.' She is a sinless virgin, free of stain in mind and body. Similarly, Miss Brodie tries to show herself pure in mind and body. It is her earnest desire to remain virtuous and other-worldly like Kilmeny. Though, her secret relationship with Mr Gordon Lowther, the music teacher is known to everyone.

Like the lines from Keats, which are constant reminders of death and the transient nature of life and time. Miss Brodie again recites the lines from Robert Burns's song '*My Nanie's Awa*' before her class as:

Come autumn sae pensive, in yellow and gray,  
And soothe me wi' tidings o' nature's decay (PMJB 47)

This unfolds the unfulfilled love of Miss Brodie with her lost love, Hugh Carruthers and her unconsummated love with Mr Teddy Lloyd. The character portrayal of Hugh represents the character of Burns, as both displays, the same likings and background and even attain an untimely death.

In the novel, Spark uses Biblical quotations and references from the King James Bible to present a contrast between the thoughts and actions of the characters. “O where Shall I find a virtuous woman, for her price is above rubies.” (PMJB 6) This is Proverb 31:10 from King Lemuel’s Lesson of Chastity. It enlists the requirements for a woman to have true virtues. Being a teacher, Miss Brodie is expected to impart value-based education to her pupils. She occasionally follows lessons from the Bible but most of the time, she manipulates her set to take control over their lives. This makes her far away from being regarded as a virtuous woman.

Apart from literary allusions and references, the novelist also refers to traditional folk songs and ballads in the novel. It is represented through the character of Mr Lowther, a music teacher, who sings as:

March, march, Ettrick and Teviotdale,  
 Why the de’il dinna ye march *forward* in order?  
 March, march, Eskdale and Liddesdale,  
 All the Blue Bonnets are bound for the Border. (PMJB 87)

These are the lines of poetry by Sir Walter Scott. The McCalmans, a folk song trio from Scotland also used this poem to display their fascination with the folk tradition of Scotland. The song is a part of their music album titled *Scots Abroad* released in 2006.

Similarly, Mr Lowther sings a song that he dedicates to Miss Brodie at the supper:  
 O mother, mother, make my bed,  
 O make it soft and narrow,  
 For my true love died for me today.  
 I’ll die for him tomorrow. (PMJB 88)

The lines have been taken from a traditional Scottish ballad ‘*Barbara Allen*.’ It shows how a beautiful maid named Barbara Allen denies the love of a dying man and later on she dies of grief. The song of Mr Lowther also indicates that he loves Miss Brodie unconditionally but she rejects his love for someone else. The novel also has quotations from Psalms and hymns like ‘*All people that on earth do dwell*’, of William Kethe, a Scottish Psalter.

The novel is full of allusions and direct references to renowned figures from the field of science, literature, art and historical events. It represents both types of intertextualities, viz. obligatory and optional. The story refers to political figures like Benito Mussolini, Stanley Baldwin, Adolf Hitler and famous painters like Leonardo da Vinci, Giotto and Vincent van Gogh. Spark, being a Scott, deliberately mentions Scottish writers and historians such as James Hogg, Robert Burns, R. L. Stevenson, David Hume, James Boswell, Sir Walter Scott, Thomas Carlyle. The novel also refers to historical events like the Battle of Flodden, the Spanish Civil War, the Scottish Nationalist Movement and World War I.

## Concluding Remarks

Intertextuality promotes the idea that creating and analyzing a text is not an activity to be carried out in isolation but can be a shared activity. In the light of this statement, the present study finds out that Muriel Spark’s *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* successfully establishes a new form of communication between the reader and the text. It helps the readers to interpret the text with great liberty. It facilitates the readers to interpret the original text and texts of all kinds as referred to within the original text. It is a creative element that

brings a new dimension to existing work. The novel represents elements of intertextuality in true spirit. Spark incorporates multiple intertextual elements from other classical texts to enhance the reading experience of the readers. It enables them to comprehend the multi-layered meanings embedded in the main plot.

Thus, the present research concludes that intertextuality is an author's borrowing from another piece of work to enhance the reading experience and analysis for the reader by transforming and adding the essence of the borrowed work. Spark's artistic and skillful application of the technique of intertextuality in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* enhances the meaning of the text and challenges the readers to look out for the multiple interpretations of the text.

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## Putting 'Presence into Absence': Re-visiting Black Diasporic History through Bernardine Evaristo's *Soul Tourists*

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### *Abstract*

*This paper explores Bernardine Evaristo's Soul Tourists (2005) as a source of re-writing/re-visiting black diasporic history. Through the protagonists, Stanley and Jessie, the writer examines stories which have remained obscured since centuries. Ghosts of historical black figures, which haunt Europe, appear to Stanley and through a dialogue between them, Evaristo makes Stanley re-discover the past. With questions of identity and belonging, the protagonists decide to take their specific journeys which is physical and metaphorical at the same time. Their journeys, however, detour from Paul Gilroy's insistence on the Middle Passage and take an alternate route that connects Europe with Africa. Therefore, with the help of critiques on Gilroy's theories, pointed out in The Black Atlantic, the paper argues that through an insistence on road travel across spaces/places, initiated by a black British woman, the novel seeks to encode black 'presences' beyond the Anglophone world and, consequently, induce a symbolic value to Africa.*

*Keywords: Black history, Black Atlantic, Black British Women, Routes*

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*"But every British person has some personal connection to these hidden 'overseas' adventures. Living with this past has often been a lonely experience, like walking a quiet path, full of shadowy ghost sightings, and having to reconcile those with the popular version of Britain propagated through its mainstream historical narrative. I see a history of black contributions all over this country, almost never acknowledged, while the statues and buildings and books in the visible environment suggest a sanitised, even misleading façade."*

--Afua Hirsch

### **Introduction**

When Afua Hirsch recounts a feeling of unbelonging and disillusionment in these lines, what is also conspicuous is the idea of 'absences.' In her book *Brit(ish): On Race, Identity and Belonging* (2018), she deftly relates personal experience of hostility in Britain and links with the political to reveal its complicated history of race and racism. While discussing issues of colourism, she delves into facts that unveil the looming presence of blacks involved in building and re-building the economic, social and cultural aspects of Britain. In a similar grain, Bernardine Evaristo, in an interview with Anita Sethi, too dwells on this idea of 'absences' and 'presences' and states it as one of the prime objectives for her

writing ("Bernardine Evaristo"). Evaristo also shares her frustration at the insufficient exposure of black British women writers and the stories that they tell. For instance, writers like Beryl Agatha Gilroy, Joan Riley, Buchi Emecheta and Grace Nichols began their writing career since the 1980s, but did not receive due attention until recently. Books like Zachary Leader's *On Modern British Fiction* (2002), Phillip Tew's *The Contemporary British Novel* (2004), James F. English's *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British Fiction* (2006), Richard Bradford's *The Novel Now: Contemporary British Fiction* (2007), has overlooked the contributions of these writers. Interestingly, their invisibility falls diametrically in the context of a growing body of African-American literature, which makes the struggle of these writers more difficult. Therefore, black British women writers like Evaristo have been attempting to open up multiple possibilities for discussions on diverse range of immigrant experiences in Britain. Her works foreground endeavours to "... recontextualise the hegemonic structures of Britain simply by positioning black women at the centre of public discourse and therefore transforming the conversations" (Foreword).

One such endeavour is Evaristo's *Soul Tourists* (2005), where she explores Afro-European connections while also addressing pertinent issues of racism and blackness. The novel is set in Britain in the late 1980s with an exploration of lesser-known black history from the time of Hannibal of Carthage around 250 BC. It deals with the journey of two protagonists, Stanley Williams and Jessie O' Donnell, of Caribbean and African descent respectively, through Europe to the Middle East. During the adventurous journey, ghosts of historical black figures visit Stanley whose contribution has become a part of a forgotten memory. Most of such facts relating to blacks are shrouded in mystery, while some are simply excluded from the purview of documentation. For example, the fact that the Moors, whose origins were in North Africa, had ruled Spain for eight hundred years or even the fact that Queen Charlotte of England, the wife of King George III, was of mixed origin, possibly African. So much of black history has been erased that Evaristo is desperate enough to voice out her objective of re-visiting history into the mouths of one of the historical figures that Stanley encounters. Joseph Boulogne, a black fencer and classical composer of Paris in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, ardently implores Stanley that: "I fell prey to national amnesia/ I beg of you, make of me a memory once more/ Let me be known" (Evaristo 121). This plea is what dominates Evaristo's intention for the whole novel.

The protagonists, Jessie and Stanley, significantly contribute to Evaristo's objective of revisiting black history by travelling through an alternate route, in fact geographically a closer route, that connects Europe with Africa. In this context, the paper argues that Evaristo's *Soul Tourists* problematizes Paul Gilroy's observations in *The Black Atlantic* (1993) by encoding black 'presences' beyond the Anglophone world, particularly the Mediterranean. For this, the paper examines how travelling through diverse spaces allows the protagonists to reconcile with their own past and the past of black history which haunts Europe. Like Europe's history, Gilroy's theories are also not devoid of 'absences'. Therefore, with the help of critiques on his theories, pointed out in *The Black Atlantic*, the paper argues that through an insistence on travel across spaces/places, initiated by a black British woman, the novel seeks to induce a symbolic value to Africa and, consequently, the Strait of Gibraltar, through which the Atlantic and the Mediterranean are connected.

## Re-routing journey to Africa

In her book, *The Cultural Memory of Africa* (2016), Leila Kamali argues that travel helps bridge the rupture that black Britons experience while tracing their ancestral roots. She states in relation to Evaristo's *Lara* that, with the eponymous protagonist's travel to Africa, her "relationship with the dialogic is resumed, reminding her that there are other stories to hear, outside of a monocultural version of Britishness" (229). Similarly, Jessie and Stanley, as Janine Hauthal argues, are "counter-travellers" who explore underrepresented stories of Europe's whitewashed history (49). It is travel that enable these characters to grapple with issues relating to identity and belonging as black immigrants living in Britain. However, unlike Lara, Stanley and Jessie do not travel to Africa or cross the Atlantic to recuperate the rupture with their homeland. Gilroy's insistence on the Middle Passage, gives details of going back in time but not "across in space – to diasporic and global engagements with slavery and to the different histories of race and empire" (Goyal xi). Therefore, Evaristo presents a story, where Stanley and Jessie detour from the triangular route that connects the Caribbean, Africa and the Americas, and instead travel through France, Spain, Italy, Turkey and Kuwait, during the course of which they each discover aspects of their own identity and the complicated relationship of Europe with Africa.

Evaristo re-routes the journey in the opposite direction of the Atlantic through road travel, which allows the protagonists to experience the physicality of the places that are embedded with historical and cultural significance. Each chapter in the novel is separated by road signs, symbolically encapsulating the ideas ensued. The protagonists, in turn, pass through cities, country roads, coastlines, mountains, and make sense of the possibilities that crossing the Atlantic would not have granted.

Stanley discovers that the places they pass through are haunted by the ghostly presence of historical figures like Shakespeare's Dark Lady or Clerkenwell's Lucy Negro, Loïse Marie or The Black Nun of Moret, Joseph Boulogne, Zaryab, Hannibal of Carthage, Alessandro de' Medici, Mary Jane Seacole, Abram Petrovich Gannibal, Alexander Pushkin and Queen Charlotte of England. These are all black figures and they appear in diverse spaces like an ordinary café in Paris, a beach overlooking the Strait of Gibraltar, the Alps, the streets of Florence, the Silken Road, the slave market of Constantinople and so on, denoting the historical presence of black people and their contribution in the diaspora, including the Mediterranean. For example, Hannibal of Carthage had discovered the route through the Alps years before Napoleon. Again, Zaryab's pioneering work in introducing music, cuisine and fashion from the Mediterranean in Cordoba, is another instance of transculturality and foundations of civilization that goes beyond Gilroy's insistence on the Middle Passage as "counterculture of modernity" (Gilroy 36). The Mediterranean, acting as the buffer zone between two continents, is seen here the centre of transcultural exchanges.

These instances largely speak of Evaristo's conscious attempts at drawing a nexus between the black Atlantic, the Middle East and Africa, to redress discussions which mainly focus on a "racialised and diminutive division of Africa" (Zezeza 43). As Stanley and Jessie cross through "barbed-wire fences", "upturned" oil tankers, "concrete lookout posts, derelict tanks", it marks a stark distinction from the West that they leave behind (Evaristo 266-7). It also draws attention to Europe's political and economic ties with the Middle and the northern part of Africa, particularly Morocco, which lacks mention in discussions of black diaspora. In his analysis of the black Atlantic, Paul T. Zezeza refers to John Hunwick and Eve Troutt



Powell, who are of the view that “the compartmentalising of Africa into zones that are treated as ‘Middle East’ and ‘Africa’ is a legacy of Orientalism and colonialism. North Africa, including Egypt, is usually seen as forming part of Middle East” (44). Zeleza critiques Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic* on similar grounds. Thus, Stanley sitting on the coast of the Strait of Gibraltar and sensing the wind “that had swept all the way from Africa...passing through swamp and jungle, mountain and valley, over desert and savannah, until it finally arrived at the beaches of Morocco and tore across the strait”, gives instance of the novel dismantling that legacy (Evaristo 155).

### **The Atlantic and the ship as metaphors**

In connection to Gilroy’s theories on the Middle Passage, the Atlantic and the image of the ship have been used as metaphors to denote the ideas of hybridity, fluidity and transnationalism in the black diaspora. In fact, the arrival of immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean to Britain has been symbolically associated with these metaphors. It gained much popularity especially since the advent of the Windrush immigrants in 1948. Writers like Caryl Phillips, Fred d’ Aguir, John Agard, Grace Nichols, Andrea Levy etc. have used the imagery of the ship and the Atlantic in various ways to denote the displaced and exiled status of such immigrants. In *Soul Tourists*, interestingly, Evaristo demystifies these metaphors in order to draw the idea of transculturality and hybridization of culture beyond the Anglophone world. For this, she draws the imagery of an immobile, broken-down ship and its passengers drowning.

The novel opens with a graphic description of Stanley’s father, Clasford’s, dilapidated house, and the objects inside it – stationary, dusty and rotten. The house’s representation of the MS Herald shipwreck as frozen in a traumatic moment of the past reflects Clasford’s inability to live in the present. The trauma of the Middle Passage and the disillusionment faced in Britain due to everyday casual and structural racism, together materialize to literally and symbolically render him disabled and emotionally stagnant. Clasford repeatedly reminds Stanley, that “*we doan belong ina this country*” because the former suffers from an acute sense of alienation and displacement in the host land (emphasis original, Evaristo 19). His “chosen country” has changed but his “home remained an island” in his childhood heart (256). Therefore, from Clasford’s representation, the past “emerges as a space of insufficiency, frozen in time, unable to ‘speak’ to the diasporic present, and desiring, more than anything, to be redramatized by the diasporan children” (Kamali 157).

There are also references of an old globe that has gone “thirty years out of date” and “tower of old boxes: official documents from the years of marriage, houses rented, bought; letters dating back to the 1940s; the passport dated 1956”, which explicates the idea of a time trapped in the past (Evaristo 6). The house then metamorphoses into a water body, probably symbolising the Atlantic, as Clasford struggles to hold on to his memories of the past. Stanley imagines trying to save his father from drifting in the water, but fails. The Atlantic, here, obstructs both the father and the son from communicating with each other and their pasts. These metaphors become “more of an obstacle than a passageway, a barrier, rather than a conduit” (Mathy 112). This is because of the historical and cultural rupture that most black immigrants in Britain experience in connection to their homeland. To add to this, Stanley recalls how his parents had taught him to honour them but “not those who went before, / stuffed anonymously into an airless trunk/ with moth-eaten clothes and discarded

mementoes" (Evaristo 122). This rupture, as Leila Kamali clearly states, can be restored through travel but Clasford and Stanley's stationary existence disallows it.

Moreover, Stanley's obliviousness to the unique features of his face, which is "loaded with the cargo of many seafarers", and his obvious obsession with 'whiteness', positions him as starkly opposite to Jessie (Evaristo 29). Therefore, in the novel we do not find the demand or desire of 'redramatization' in Stanley, a 'diasporan' child. It is rather Jessie who initiates the journey and enables Stanley to reconcile with his past. Despite Stanley's misgivings, Jessie insists on road travel in her old, battered car, Matilda, and as "independent travellers" direct their cartographic journeys (138). Here, Jessie's car stands in opposition to the image of the shipwreck, sunk in the bottom of the Atlantic. In contrast, the car not only accommodates the travellers as their "sleeping chamber" but also protects them from the perilous flood that hit their campsite in Marabella (145). These experiences of travel and the diverse accounts of black historical figures, finally enable Stanley to, metaphorically, sail together with his father (256). Yet again, it is "the ocean *bed*", rather than the ocean itself, that is accentuated, as Clasford's body rests in eternal amity with his son and their troubled histories (emphasis added 257).

### **Black women, mobility and agency**

Jessie is an assertive woman, who is independent of her thoughts and is proud of her appearance. Unlike Stanley, who "knew little of Africa beyond the popular image of starving peasants and corrupt governments", Jessie is more conscious of her place of origin and her identity as a black British woman when she says: "I may have a cantankerous obeah woman/buried not so deeply in my genetic code, but I'm a Yorkshire woman, and reed proud of it" (Evaristo 153, 198). Being aware of her black history, Jessie is also sceptical about the politics of Race Relations Department and the dominance of African-American culture. As an orphan, Jessie is brought up in St Ann's Children's Home surrounded by uncaring nuns and is faced with a series of rejections as she grows older. Even all her romantic relationships fail, but she confidently relates that "I do not dwell on the past, me" (36).

Jessie's inherent ability to identify her 'self' through her experiences of struggle can be assigned to a legacy of black women in the diaspora who have been oppressed, but have confronted it through strategies of survival. In relation to this, Lucy Evans' article can be referred, where she mentions Reid Pharr critiquing Gilroy's "insubstantial treatment of gender issues" (257). The novel redresses such ellipses through the character of Jessie and the descriptions of the female historical figures in the novel, particularly Lucy Negro, Louise Marie and Mary Jean Seacole. Each of these figures manifest a part of Jessie's past experience of growing up, which together complement the former's personality.

However, not all of these historical figures can communicate with Stanley. Unlike the male figures, the ghosts of these black female historical figures are stuck in the past. When Lucy Negro visits Stanley, she hardly has a voice. It is an omniscient narrator who describes her, as she takes possession of Jessie's body to make Stanley aware of her presence. Subsequently, Stanley meets Louise Marie, the illegitimate, half-African daughter of Louis XVI, trapped in a mirror in the Palace of Versailles, which immediately reminds Stanley of Jessie's abandoned childhood.

In contrast to the earlier encounters, Stanley's meeting with the ghost of Mary Jane Seacole seems the most realistic. He is introduced to Mary Seacole in a bus amongst other

passengers on his way to Istanbul. She is boisterous and on being asked who she is, she states her name with a “self-reverential tone” (Evaristo 223). She is certainly proud of her Scottish-Jamaican past and has a wide experience of travelling from the Caribbean islands to Russia, crossing through the Atlantic and the Mediterranean countries. Her extensive experience and conversant nature, instantaneously draws resemblances to Jessie. This is why Stanley starts evaluating his relationship with Jessie after his brief meeting with her. Seacole also selflessly tended the English when they suffered from the yellow fever but while Florence Nightingale is revered for her benevolent actions, the former remains unnoticed. Therefore, Mary Seacole is seen carefully holding her autobiography, *The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands*, as the last source of evidence to state her presence and contribution in Europe.

The ghost of Mary Seacole has a voice, can easily communicate with Stanley and, therefore, has agency. From these female black figures from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century, we clearly see a progression in their positions as women. With Jessie, therefore, a woman of 21<sup>st</sup> century, we have a character whose past experiences of rejection do not deter her courage to challenge norms. Without anyone to rely on, Jessie lives with the motto to constantly be on the move: “A sky. A road. Going somewhere.... I’m on the long road to nowhere in this place. I want to be out there” (Evaristo 38, 53). Like Mary Seacole’s “longing to travel”, it is Jessie’s desire for constant mobility that enable her to assert an identity that is unbound by cultural and national boundaries (224). The absence of a kin in Jessie’s life is substituted by the presence of her ancestors, whom she revered. Moreover, due to the ‘presence’ of these legacies in Jessie, she is also safeguarded from the ghosts of her past and that of Europe, and through her, Stanley learns to honour his own. Towards the end of the novel, Stanley, enriched by his ancestral roots through Jessie and the visitations, decides to travel on his own and explore more of such unacknowledged historical facts.

## Conclusion

*Soul Tourists*, thus, is a novel which dismantles all hegemonic conceptions that restricts mobility and polyphonic voices. Its engagement with the past shows that the unsettled histories and black British people’s fractured relationship with it determine their troubled present. Hence the only way to address it is by exploring new alternatives to document ‘absences’ and rejecting narratives which dwell on methods of universalism and essentialism. By critiquing Gilroy’s observations, the novel, however, does not entirely reject, but rather supplements his theories with additional subjectivities. Rightly so, Evaristo too affirms that “we’re all standing on the shoulders of the people who came before.... It’s up to us to talk about the heritage and lineage of activism and understand that generations have paved the way for where we are today” (Foreword).

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## Ecocriticism and William Wordsworth: A Study of Selected Poems

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### *Abstract*

*William Rueckert's term "Ecocriticism" coined in 1978 has today evolved into a full-fledged and trending theory. The careful study of the sensitivity of harmonious relationship between man and Nature is the need of the present human kind facing the disastrous pandemic i.e. COVID-19. The ecocritical study is the only way forward to destress the tension and harmonise the man- Nature relationship, by making us realise that Nature matters to us and not we to Nature. This is the fact that humans cannot survive without Nature, but Nature can survive better sans humans. In the world of materialism led by mammon worship man today has forgotten to respect Nature, to sympathise and share, and has regressed into cyborg, piling money and threatening all forms of life on earth. William Wordsworth is a pioneer and grand poet shaking a reader's consciousness and directing him from the life consuming and blind materialistic chase towards Nature and bliss. The present paper endeavours to attempt ecocritical study of William Wordsworth's "The World is Too Much With Us" and "The Solitary Reaper" to counter problems like environmental pollution, pandemics, climate change, global warming, ecological imbalance etc.*

*Keywords: Ecocriticism, 'oikos', 'logy', Nature consciousness, ecoconsciousness*

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William Rueckert in his critical essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" (1978) coined the word "Ecocriticism" which today has evolved into a full-fledged theory. Ecocriticism as a word etymologically coming from Greek root word 'oikos' signifies earth and 'logy' signifies logical discourse. Thus the term 'Ecology' takes us to 'Ecocriticism', which as a theory endeavours to unravel the environmental, ecological issues in the text. For Lawrence Buell ecocriticism is "a study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist's praxis" (*The Environmental Imagination*, 430). In his *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*, Buell highlights the significance of the nature consciousness as old roots to civilisations, "If environmental criticism today is still an

emergent discourse it is one with very ancient roots. In one form or another, the 'idea of nature' has been a dominant or at least residual concern for literary scholars and intellectual historians ever since these fields came into being" (5). Ecocriticism has made the study of literature elaborated, from a mere nature-study to a study of the nature inclusive of its mysteries as manifested in human and non-human world. Ecocriticism as a theory to interpret creative writing unfolds before the literary critic the intricacies as the difference between two shades of ecology, the shallow and the deep. The shallow ecology is inherently anthropocentric unlike the deep ecology. The shallow ecology thrusts that the business of whole nature is to serve humans, being nature's masters. Shallow ecology makes man to think that he is the superior creature to all other creatures of nature and has the right to use and exploit all other creatures including wildlife or natural resources including coal, forests, gas or petroleum for his development. The deep ecology, on the other hand, challenges this anthropocentric attitude of shallow ecology and promotes to keep nature its original form, unexploited by any artificial invasion. It stresses the equality amongst all natural organisms and defies all hierarchies. Ecoconsciousness is the by-product of ecocriticism which cures man's ego consciousness. The present natural calamities in the form of global warming and the pandemic the world is facing are the result of human culture led by shallow ecology. And today ecocriticism is most relevant to bring awareness to human centric development and to ensure sustainable development.

Like two shades of ecology, we have two waves of ecocriticism- in the first wave the ecocritics focused on nature writing literature including poetry and wilderness fiction (Buell 138). The ecocritics in this wave upheld the philosophy of organism under the natural environment. Preservation of 'biotic community' was the sole aim of the first wave ecocritics (Coupe 4). Ecocriticism, under the first wave attempted earth-care by propagating the effects of culture upon nature and berating its despoilers, and reversing their harm through political action.

The ecocritics under the second wave inclined more towards environmental justice which they also understood as social justice, attempting to take urban landscape as seriously as natural landscape (Buell 22). This second wave of ecocriticism is also popular as the revisionist criticism. It endeavours to identify the remnants of nature in urban areas and surface the crimes of eco-injustice against nature under anthropocentric human culture. An ecocritic focuses on nature in the text and uses it as context for understanding the human culture in relation to nature, the ways in which nature is devalued, degraded, disrespected and sacrificed to human ambitions of development. For an ecocritic, the concept of nature is very wide. For him ecocriticism is not merely the study of nature as represented in literature and nature for him is not only a fanciful world of beautiful landscapes, flora and fauna, but, the whole physical environment consisting of human and nonhuman, living and non-living. Ecocriticism is the understanding of interconnections, interactions and exchanges between these two entities. As far as there is harmony between man and nature, there is healthy ecosystem for man, biodiversity and earth. "The modern ecological consciousness has a feeling that the balance between human and the natural world must be maintained. A perfect ecology is the one in which plants, animals, birds and human beings live in such harmony that none dominates or destroys the other" (Frederick 147).

Human nature is inherently anthropocentric, positioning human at the top in the pyramid of all creatures, biotic or abiotic. Man considers it to be his right to exploit

everything in nature for his comfort as he considers himself superior to everything/everybody else. Against this anthropocentric approach, ecocriticism decenters humans, offers biocentric vision and exposes the complex interrelationships and interdependences between human and the non-human. Sustainable understanding, harmony and development is the goal of ecocriticism and through these only a better future is possible. All organisms deserve to live and evolve like humans. The animals, the fish, the birds, the trees, the marginal, the women, the tribal all have to perform their role to upkeep earth's life support system. Judicious use of natural resources can only ensure the sustainable development and the continuity of life on earth. "The most common measure to tackle environmental crisis is sustainable development" (Frederick 128). This specifically means the judicious use of natural resources without endangering the whole environment including the well-being of all human beings (*Essays in Ecocriticism* 36). Humans have been unethical in their approach under anthropocentric culture because of which they are facing natural calamities and pandemics often now as backlash from mother-nature. Under the overpowering influence of science, technology and internet, man has devastated the ecosystems in biosphere to an extent, that he has endangered himself too.

Ecocriticism is interdisciplinary in nature, drawing heavily from many existing theories. All sciences also come forward to enrich ecocriticism like the new theories including post-colonial ecocriticism, ecofeminism, ecomarxism, ecospiritualism etc. At the same time, ecocriticism differs from other theories as unlike these it treats earth as ecosphere, whereas other theories treat earth as social sphere which leads to ego-consciousness. Ecocriticism directs to eco-consciousness and thus leads to the understanding that humans as species are equal to the other species or organism in the eyes of mother-nature and we as humans have to leave the anthropocentric approach and learn to co-inhabit earth with fellow inhabitants, and biotic /abiotic as well. Ecocriticism enables the reader to realise that nature is such a power which really exists and is not merely a linguistically or socially constructed object. Nature has abundance for our needs but it also punishes for our greed in the form of natural calamities like pandemics.

Ecoconsciousness is probably Indian civilisation's contribution to the world. In India ecoconsciousness has been preached right through Vedas, Puranas, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Panchtantras, festivals, oral and folk cultures etc., but ecocriticism as a discipline is borrowed from Wordsworth as pantheism and rebranded in America by three major American writers i.e. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), Margaret Fuller (1810-1850), and Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862). These writers worshipped nature and saw it as the driving force of the universe and the reflection of divinity. All three of them belonged to New England and were philosophers, writers and poets known as the transcendentalists, the unconventionalists. Ralph Waldo Emerson expressed his enjoyment with nature in his *Nature* (1836). Emerson celebrated transcendentalism as a philosophy, a way of life. Margaret Fuller's *Summer on the Lakes* (1843) is a nonfiction book regarding her travels to the Great Lakes region. Branding transcendentalism as a philosophy, Fuller highlights the utilitarian motives of the settlers and spiritual aesthetic aims of tourists.

It is significant to note that it is Henry David Thoreau, and not Emerson or Fuller, who is considered to be the father of Ecocriticism whose *Walden or Life in the Woods* (1854) offers autobiographical account of his two years stay in a hut on the shore of Walden Pond,

about two miles away from his home town, Concord. This book is his classic contribution to advocate the return to nature to renew the self.

In recent times with the advent of Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination* (1995) and Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm's joint publication, *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996) that ecocriticism got established in the 1990s and the critics got attracted to focus on the relationship between man and nature with special focus on Romantic poetry in general and William Wordsworth in particular. His philosophy of pantheism and his being a nature poet make him a great attraction to any ecocritical essay. He always viewed nature as superior to humans and their anthropogenic or materialist culture. Wordsworth in his own right also played a significant role in the creation of an "ecological perspective" which Worster defines as, "a search for holistic or integrated perception, an emphasis on interdependence and relatedness in nature, and an intense desire to restore man to a place of intimate intercourse with the vast organism that constitutes the earth" (82). As a poet Wordsworth was a product of Romanticism which was an artistic, literary and intellectual Movement that commenced in Europe by the end of the 18th century as a reaction against the Age of Enlightenment, Industrial Revolution and the scientific rationalization of Nature. Romanticism as reaction against the anti-Enlightenment movement, as Jonathan Bate stressed, searches for "a symbiosis between mind and nature" in order to suggest "a challenge within the realms of both political and scientific ecology" (as cited in Coupe, 2000, p. xvii). The free expression of the artist is the hall mark of this Movement and so is of Wordsworth and his imagination focussing on the man's separation from nature.

William Wordsworth was born in 1770 and grew as a major English Romantic poet. He is considered as a pioneer of English Romanticism. He remained as Britain's poet-laureate from 1843 until his death in 1850. He is celebrated as a great poet for his immense contributions to the repository of English literature. His poetic views towards nature and man's separation from nature, and his treatment of nature have positioned him as an important icon of ecocritical studies. He propagated what he felt that nature has been superior to human beings whose survival is dependent upon Bate proclaims that Romantics were "the first ecologists" due to their reaction to "the ideology of capital" and originating a "holistic vision" of Nature (57). McKusick in his *Green Writing* suggests that "English Romantics were the first full-fledged ecocritical writers in the Western literary tradition" (19). He further maintains that Wordsworth was the "founder of English Romanticism" (5) and had a "vital influence" and "contributed to the fundamental ideas and core values of the modern environmental movement" (11). His retreat to the Lake District and his doing away with the fragmentary life of the technological society of the Enlightenment, urban age make him "ecological critic of the Enlightenment" (139).

In this background let us analyse two of Wordsworth's poems. "The World is Too Much With Us" is Wordsworth's celebrated sonnet in which the poet criticises the world of Industrial Revolution absorbing man in materialism and separating him from mother nature. The sonnet was composed circa 1802 and was published in *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1802). The sonnet follows the Italian model of fourteen lines and is written in iambic pentameter.

The poet in the poem highlights the tragedy of human life in which humans have become machines and they are wasting their life, energies and imagination in "Getting and spending". He laments that his contemporaries have broken all cords with mother nature and



“Little we see in Nature that is ours”. He regrets that we, as modern men, have given our hearts for materialistic gains and labels this deal as, “a sordid boon” and suffers compunction for the materialistic human beings’ inability to tune with the “Sea that bares her bosom to the moon; The winds that will be howling at all hours, And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers”. Modern human beings are unmoved by nature’s beauties and he wishes to be regressive than be monetarily rich, to be a pagan than the Enlightened one, to be connected with nature than being out of tune so that he may be “less forlorn.”

Another significant poem by Wordsworth is “The Solitary Reaper” published in 1807 in his collection of *Poems*, in two volumes. This poem was inspired by the poet’s visit to Scotland in 1803 with his sister Dorothy Wordsworth. The poem is a pastoral snapshot of a young solitary woman reaping alone in a field in the Highlands of Scotland, singing a plaintive song in Gaelic. The poem consists of four octaves, primarily written in iambic tetrameter and following the rhyme scheme *ababccdd*. The narrator is captivated by the sight and sound of the titular woman, whose arresting melody fills the empty valley. Although the narrator does not understand the language in which she sings, he imagines that her song describes ancient tragedies or personal sorrows. He does not understand the song nor can he tell what it is about. He can also not find the language to describe its beauty and feels that the traditional poetic metaphors for a beautiful song fail him. Wordsworth worships nature unflinchingly in this poem too, to shake materialistic human beings out of the blinding Enlightenment. He as a narrator of the poem reflects on a powerful experience of nature from a tranquil distance. No doubt, he does not know what the reaper is singing about, even then he seems to ascribe to her integrity and purity on the basis of her rustic existence and relative proximity to nature. The poem celebrates the nobility and honesty of physical labour the reaping girl performs. The poem presents two sets of actions; on the one hand, the reaper “cuts and binds the grain, And sings a melancholy strain”, on the other, the narrator along with the reader “Behold” and “listen.” In this way there is an implicit distinction between the reaper and the speaker in terms of their relationship with nature. While the reaper works directly on nature, the speaker observes it and her from a distance. She is a participant while he and the reader are spectators. Defining music Herbert Antcliffe notes two vital points:

When we come to a serious study of the position taken by music in the polity of human life, there are two points which are most obvious. The first of these is that the art, in its elemental forms chiefly, but also in a less degree in those more highly developed, has had a widespread and an effective influence on nearly all departments of human life. Secondly, that influence is the most unaccountable and erratic of all the influences to which human life is subject. It is an influence of which no science has yet given any adequate explanation, and least of all those sciences which are most applicable to the subject, psychology and sociology.

Highlighting the significance of the reaper’s music as nature’s gift, the narrator in the poem tells that she is, “single in the field”, still her “melancholy strain” is “overflowing” “the Vale”. Her musical song is very soothing for him as that of “Nightingale... to weary bands Of travellers in some shady haunt, Among Arabian sands” and of “Cuckoo-bird, Breaking the silence of the seas Among the farthest Hebrides”. The narrator does not understand the song, but knows the significance of the music and is sure of the healing strength of music, “The music in my heart I bore, Long after it was heard no more.”

There are so many poems by William Wordsworth on Ecoconsciousness that a full-fledged thesis can also be insufficient to analyse his *oeuvre*. Nevertheless, by analysing his two poems in the backdrop of ecocriticism as philosophy it can be noted that Wordsworth's "green poems" provide the contemporary man living in a world haunted by fragmentations and illusory pursuits of reality and technology, with a new awareness through which he can realise the interconnectedness, mutuality and interdependence of man and Nature in a vast ecosystem. His works will continue to sensitise mankind towards nature amid the humdrum of life.

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**‘After Nature’ in William Wordsworth’s ‘Speech at the Laying  
of the Foundation Stone.’**

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*Abstract*

*Nature in Wordsworth – a conformist category- has come under steady fire since the 1970s for having been construed as an adherent to imagination. Research, nourished by the foundational principles of Deconstruction, has falsified such conclusions, reiterating that not only is imagination an unconditioned category contradictory to nature, it is what terrorizes nature upon confrontation. I have deigned to call it ‘After-Nature’, an epi-noumenon devised to theorize such confrontations and draw critical materials from them. In this paper, I summarize the principles of ‘After-Nature’ by drawing on Wordsworth’s prose-tract, equating it with an aesthetic attitude contra beautiful or nature, hence Sublime.*

*Keywords: Wordsworth, Nature, After-Nature, Beautiful, Sublime*

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The term ‘Nature’ has been a source of problem for most of the Romantics; its circumvention has existed as a question of propounding myths, equating Art, parodying orthodoxy in Nature and lastly, “an” evocation of Imagination. I use the article “an” instead of “the” to denote the fact that the particularity of it rests upon the nature of its approach towards theorizing what in a layman’s terms could be called ‘given’ nature. To be more precise, imagination is entirely dependent on how it opposes traditional Nature instead of an expected synthesis; hence, imagination is an enquiry upon natural consolidation, not an acceptance of it, nor an expression of faith in any deviation from nature, be it moral, ethical, intellectual or spiritual. The indifference and subsequent defiance towards nature in the evolution of such an imagination, the methodological changes sought in its deference from nature and the timidity experienced in any encounter with imagination (‘Anti-nature’) has hereby been deemed ‘After-Nature’ which could be hypothesized as a milestone in the itinerary from nature onto imagination.

This philosophy of ‘After-Nature’ has its roots in Deconstruction – more specifically, in the research conducted by Geoffrey Hartman on the poetics of William Wordsworth. Without diving into the subject promptly, I wish to notify one research very briefly that precedes Hartman’s work with the intention of communicating why ‘After-Nature’ is a theoretical possibility in the course of defining sentient, or “feeling” imagination. John Crowe Ransom in his essay “William Wordsworth: Notes Toward an Understanding of Poetry” would call the term “Dystactical” or *Rufflers*: where a logical confusion is deliberately cultivated. The terms would be such as inversions, alterations in the idiom, ambiguities and obscurities, faulty series, condensations and ellipses, omission of rational connectives. They too stick to the given or tenor in a sense, but they return it to its original inchoate state of nature, so to speak, where we have to look to find the logical

connections. This category has perhaps as many varieties named in the rhetorics as the one which follows; and Longinus is a critic who knows how to pin them down (505).

The deliberate cultivation of “logical confusion” entails to an argument on the structural fallacy of synthesizing the logic behind seeking co-operation between the rhetoric of nature and that of imagination. I would propose that the “confusion” emerges from coercing ‘After-Nature’ to function as a corrective category of nature which it is not. It is insufficient to say that it does not correct nature; it acts more along the lines of exposing the dereliction of nature through its own concreteness. It could be assumed further that this dichotomy can be resolved through a logical conduit which works so long as the discipline of verse, or so long as the illusion of virage (turn) sustains itself. However, the “original inchoate” state that Ransom attributes to nature might be a mistake. It belongs to what nature coerces into being categorized, anything that will abstract, or *make* abstract the conditions of earthly existence, and a return to an “original” (used in the sense of primordial here) explains why the conduit itself is its poetics, while ‘After-Nature’ is not so much a corrective tool, or an apparatus for negotiation as it is an absolute adumbration of the abstract which defends itself against this concretion, represented by Nature. All this is rendered more problematic in Ransom’s allusion to Longinus; while he evokes him as a reminder of the rhetorical brilliance of such temporal yet rational conduit. I reiterate that the ‘After-Nature’ is a category worthy of the Sublime, as I intend to break to delineate its characteristics towards the end of this thesis.

What I have proffered so far is neither innovative nor new. My intention, as I began by saying, is to build upon the work of Ransom and Hartman by splitting nature from what nature thinks but is not. Wordsworth himself was, in no way, unaware of the limitations of the apocalyptic being unearthly. In a letter written in March 1805 to Sir George Beaumont, Wordsworth’s conscientiousness on the subject shows forth as he expands upon the grief of John Wordsworth’s premature death:

Why have we a choice and a will, and a notion of justice and injustice, enabling us to be moral agents? Why have we sympathies that make the best of us afraid of inflicting pain and sorrow, which yet we see dealt about so lavishly by the supreme governor? Why should our notions of right towards each other, and to all sentient beings within our influence, differ so widely from what appears to be His notion and rule, if everything were to end here? (460)

Let us attempt to address each of these three questions, answering them to our benefit. For the first, it is safe to aver that weaponising by means of “choice”, meaning discrimination, and “will” meaning intention creates a sharp rift between natural agency, which is, in its essence, driven by a superabundance of the concrete without expressing extra-natural ends, and moral agency, which is tasked with restraining natural stimuli and re-channelling impulses towards the pursuit of an afore-mentioned end. Hence, in answer to Wordsworth’s first question, I would say that it explodes the myth of moral agency being a continuation of the natural. In response to the second, one could say that the “supreme governor” is supreme and therefore, definitely in opposition to anything that is nature or natural. Our “sympathies” are an exposure of the androgeneity of being, where infliction on any of these two contrasting forms results in our proclamation (preference?) of one for the other in a self-conscious manner. Thus, the “supreme governor” can deal so lavishly with value-judgments because He is not Nature. Similarly, the outright discrimination between the

conditioned “end” and the unconditioned “His”, symbolic of nemesis, must bring us to the realization that Wordsworth could not be more vocal of his knowledge of the irreparable rupture between the natural and the Providential, or nature and ‘After-Nature’, or nature and sublimity.

This is the format of Wordsworthian conscientiousness that I have intended to illustrate in this paper; it is “complex, thought through and hard won. It is no knee-jerk jingoism” (215), as Jonathan Bate would demonstrate in *The Song of the Earth*. Wordsworth’s poetry and prose resonate with possibilities of these kinds if one is willing to dig deep. Natural thrombosis is the beginning of ‘After-Nature’, not its explication. Complexity is heightened by Wordsworth’s anaphoric usage, drawing us into the fold of Ransom’s Longinian model. What ruffles Wordsworth is the (absent) continuation across value systems that seem to terminate abruptly while being able to provide a rational conduit through its structural turn. Whether it is “hard won” or not is a question to be dealt with, but we are in a position to declare that it is not, by any practical means, jingoistic. As the letter proceeds, Wordsworth spells out why these aforementioned value-systems are ultimately irreconcilable:

Would it not be blasphemy to say that, upon the supposition of the thinking principle being destroyed by death, however inferior we may be to the great Cause and Ruler of things, we have *more of love* in our nature than He has? ( original italics)

It might be blasphemy if interpreted from a theological perspective, but through the eyes of a humanist, Wordsworth’s complaint is simple and meaningful – Providence undoes what nature does. The acceptance of inferiority is conceptually driven; if the “Cause” and “Ruler” remain opposed to the human subject by approving “things”, both the subject and its subjective must be explained by the androgynous poet who must be destroyed naturally by “death”, as well as live beyond death through that “thinking principle” which must help him transcend the dialectic. If I were to concur that this Ruler is ‘After-Nature’, its moral superiority curses natural ends and vice-versa. Wordsworth answers his own question by means of his rhetoric – we have more love *in* Nature because He has none. The Longinian in Wordsworth creates this subtle change of direction by choosing not to naturalize imagination, Providence or the apocalyptic. Although he seems to suggest that He has *less of love*, I shall not pursue that particular drift of the argument since ‘After-Nature’ is not a category that can be negotiated with, but an absolute. Moreover, the tendency to raise issues with the superiority of the absolute by employing linguistic devices (rhetorical language) conveys to us the premonition that Wordsworth might be trying to persuade ‘After-Nature’ to manifest itself in a more synthetic sense rather than preserve its manner of indescribable disinterest. The question mark at the end voices this ambiguity, since “apocalypticism...is not about anticipating the end of the world, but about attempting to avert it by persuasive means” (99), as Greg Garrard asserts. Wordsworth’s response to Beaumont *does* anticipate an “end of the world” scenario, to be honest, and he, being terrified of this probability, uses rhetorical as his medium to negotiate with an ultimatum. This terror of the ‘After-Nature’ provokes a discussion on two things – first, I shall briefly elaborate upon its characteristics through Wordsworth’s prose tract, “Speech at the Laying of the Foundation Stone of the new School in the Village of Bowness, Windermere, 1836”; second, I shall exhibit how it overlaps with, and is wrapped in sublime tendencies by repeated invocations to moral superiority, subjective comprehension of God and idealization of an absolute.

Wordsworth's prose piece begins with the suggestion that an ideal school must be erected as a substitution to the old. After his expert advice on the construction of a library, he lays the foundation for his proposition involving the experience of nature *above* nature: It may be added, that the building, from the elegance of its architecture, and its elevated, conspicuous situation, will prove a striking ornament to the beautiful country in the midst of which it will stand. (Owen and Smyser eds., 292)

Notice that Wordsworth discriminates between the "striking ornament" of the beautiful in nature, and the elegance of architecture that betrays nature by using it as a prospective tool, enhancing its elegance at its expense. There is not enough evidence to pronounce that the "thing" is sublime, since that cannot be; in lieu of it, Wordsworth superadds the subject to the landscape, whose task is to comprehend nature from his particular place of being (I interpret "will stand" to be an ontological entity, not literal). Thus, while the architect creates possibilities for comprehension, the need for comprehending reincarnates its own sublime subject – a Kantian trope of the Mathematical kind. Its elevation, doubling up with its positional prerogative, in a manner of speaking, distances itself from nature in a theoretical fashion too; I would enforce it further by arguing that an aesthetic attitude, characterized by disinterestedness towards another aesthetic device, the "beautiful", arouses sublimity in Wordsworth's scheme of things. Wordsworth pursues this particular event for eliminating gratification from the truly beautiful too; prospects, apart from providing positional advantage, make one perceive what lies beyond the beautiful – the 'After-Nature' of an invisible apocalypse. Karl Kroeber is justified in pointing to this phenomena, that "the poet, without destroying the 'reality' of the object, attempts to suppress its normal ecology" (206). To be fair to Wordsworth, he does not destroy the objective phenomena, nor does he withhold the subject from visualizing it and nothing more. The noumenal in Wordsworth is therefore kept outside the prose, merely appearing as an implicative when the assumed subject has succeeded in separating objective reality from subjective being. Kroeber is correct in assessing that this too requires some degree of suppression – as Wordsworth clearly indicates, elegance stands *above* natural beauty, just as the standing subject implies a receptive, seated nature. Suppression of nature by the after-natural is consciously pursued, whereas the noumenal implicative is unconsciously reinstated as the ego-ideal. All this is done in complete acknowledgment of what Kroeber refers to as "normal ecology", or in Wordsworth's words, "beautiful country". This is a statement which stands in contradiction to my original proposition, but I am inclined to cite it as an instance, where the supernumerary aesthetic attitude forms the foundation of this theorization, deviating from it gradually, becoming the new-normal of ecology. Wordsworth would reintroduce the Providential in nature immediately after this event:

But after all, worldly advancement and preferment neither are, nor ought to be the *main* end of instruction, either in schools or elsewhere, and particularly in those which are in rural places, and scantily endowed. It is in the order of Providence, as we are all aware, that *most* men must end their temporal course pretty much as they began it; (293)

If comprehension of "beautiful country" cannot be deemed the main end, Wordsworth's preference for a *telos* cannot be the completion of a transitory objective, here being the pursuit of a career by the graduating students. If one takes the liberty of renaming his "main end" as his categorical imperative, then the fulfilment of purpose, upon

comprehension, rests on a denial of extrinsically wrought ends which Wordsworth negates, for it is not representative of a Universal will. As an act of compromise, he offers “the Order of Providence”, which is a distinct echo of the spiritual greatness that Longinus had sought in his treatise, *On the Sublime*. This order (both in its literal and metaphysical sense) is sublime because it redirects nature into what it *ought* to be, as opposed to what it is when left to itself. ‘After-Nature’, in Wordsworth’s discourse, dissociates nature from inherence and restructures it into selective naturalness, enjoining this cleavage with a masculine order that idealizes instead of temporalizing. This is begun by configuring nature; the realization that nature is not enough emerges from the pursuit *within* nature: “the closer we get to nature the less natural we tend to become” (Aretoulakis 179). It is complete absorption in nature that reveals its limitations, not renunciation generated from circumventing it. It is safe to declare at this point that ‘After-Nature’ inherits the replacement of natural limitations with Providential absolution through an inside out knowledge of nature, leading to exfoliation and acceptance of an absolute subject in essence.

As Wordsworth draws his prose piece to a close, he is inclined to point out the errors of religious instruction which have habitually preferred the doctrinal/scriptural over moral enlightenment:

I am not going to say that religious instruction, the most important of all, is neglected; far from it; but I affirm, that it is too often given with reference, less to the affections, to the imagination, and to the practical duties, than to subtile distinctions in points of doctrine, and to facts in scripture history, of which a knowledge may be brought out in a cathetical process. (294)

Stationing purity of correspondence above the triviality of everyday bibliophilia, Wordsworth is apt in demonstrating that reference or citations to value systems pertaining to dignity and nobility surpasses the monotony of congenial (here natural) transference of knowledge. In other words, the normal manner of knowledge inquisition is satiated through what he calls “points of doctrine”, meaning a remove from first-order realization through indoctrinations that task the knower with preservation and not creation. This is followed by factual imitations of “scriptural history” which weaken the structure by methodising banality over the truly moral. Wordsworth’s own methodology posits that imagination and affections elevate – another instance of the Longinian sublime, pursued in contradistinction to the “cathetical process”, devoid of authenticity, rendering individuality untenable. ‘After-Nature’ can be said to present Morality above, and in contrariety with moral “training”. The latest remove in this triumvirate is sublime in its preference for imagined dignity over the stereotyped kind, created, as Wordsworth pleads, against the manifestation of an impending apocalyptic. Theodor Adorno would voice his Wordsworthian pessimism in *Aesthetic Theory*, where he combats the same question, arriving at a conclusion not dissimilar from Wordsworth’s own:

In the experience of nature, dignity reveals itself as subjective usurpation that degrades what is not subordinate to the subject – the qualities – to mere material and expulses it from art as a totally indeterminate potential, even though art requires it according to its own concept. Human beings are not equipped positively with dignity; rather, dignity would be exclusively *what they have yet to achieve*. (62)

Adorno’s statement agrees with Wordsworth’s at two junctures – first, the experience of “dignity” does not precede that of nature; it is a remnant of natural experience,

as Aretoulakis would rightly opine. An excess of nature is a divorce from it, axiomatically speaking. The role of dignity is the revelation of what he calls “subjective usurpation”, which is an alternate way of theorizing Wordsworth’s metaphor on the archetype of situating the episteme in a prospect – as the viewer views the “beautiful country”, he realizes he is, by virtue of his advantageous location, a non-object, which slowly relegates from objective identification entirely – hence the usurpation of a pro non-object: the Subject. Subordination follows, which in the Wordsworthian context, acts as the hierarchizing of the Providential above different objects/objective ends. This becomes Adorno’s second agreement with the Poet, where subsumption or subordination of everything under the banner of dignity must be interlinked with the Longinian sublime that reins in natural talent under the dignity of genius. That is not the same as saying that dignity can be inherited; it is revealed as a remnant of natural experience that revises pleasure through its own categorical imperative, equating Adorno’s theory to Wordsworth’s larger aims in this piece.

To sum up, Wordsworth’s encounter with nature stands in deference against his pursuit of imagination. Nature is reluctant in encountering imagination, the theoretical premise being that nature is beautiful, whereas any ‘After-Nature’ endeavour is replete with apocalyptic overtones. The foregrounding of this particular temperament distances nature which recedes into the background as a foil. Through Wordsworth’s text, I have argued that the three dynamic doctrines of ‘After Nature’ – disinterested comprehension of the beautiful, idealization of the Providential by disproving transitory tendencies towards absolution and the proclamation of moral superiority of the dignified subject above the common rung of doctrinal/scriptural banality qualifies it as antagonistic to natural gratification. This trinity falls in line with the characteristics of the Sublime; hence, it can be justified that ‘After-Nature’ is, in fact, a modification of sublimity.

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## The Contemporary Relevance of Leslie Fiedler

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### *Abstract*

*The objective of the paper stems from the dismissals that the critical and unconventional credo of the Jewish 'UnAmerican' American (Madsen 1998) literary critic and culturalist Leslie A Fiedler (1917-2003) and his writings received after the initial (from 1948 to 1970's) acclaim that followed the publication of his path breaking essay, "Come back to the raft ag'in Huck Honey" (1948) and renowned book Love and Death in the American Novel (1960). His critical insights spawn not just six decades of American literary and cultural history, but cut across several disciplines and library shelves. Yet, towards the end of the last century, Fiedler was rubbished as an inconsequential critic and his writings almost airbrushed out of existence. The purpose of this paper is not only to respond to some of these queries but also to establish Fiedler as a critic not to be stifled, or to be considered irrelevant and irreverent. This paper establishes that Fiedler has fostered a 'brood' that thrives and lives on. This way, the paper opens up new avenues, and novel vistas for the reader to reengage with the writings of Fiedler and find significant and lasting meanings in his criticism which are relevant, thriving and alive even today*

*Keywords: UnAmerican; Love and Death in the American Novel; highbrow; lowbrow; "Come back to the raft ag'in Huck Honey!", counterculture, Avant Garde, Kitsch*

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This paper asserts the significance of the critical and unconventional credo of the Jewish 'UnAmerican' American (Madsen 1998) literary critic and culturalist, Leslie A Fiedler (1917-2003). Writing for six decades, occupying the chair of Samuel Clemens Professor at SUNY Buffalo for more than three decades, with 26 critical books, hundreds of essays and readers ranging from the academic, the scholarly, the literary, the imaginary and the common, his critical insights spawn not just six decades of American literary and cultural history, it cuts across several disciplines and library shelves. Yet, there came a time when Fiedler was rubbished as an inconsequential critic and his writings almost airbrushed out of existence. The purpose of this paper is not only to respond to some of these queries but also to establish Fiedler as a critic not to be stifled, or to be considered irrelevant and irreverent. He has fostered a 'brood' that thrives and lives on. Not aimed as a hagiography, this research paper is a testimony of scholarly respect for the one-all critic and culturalist that Leslie Fiedler is. This paper, thus, is both, a revisitation and a revaluation.

As a critic beyond the narrow confines of particularities of boundaries and borders, Leslie A Fiedler is to be seen as one who remained global in many ways. By using embarrassingly popular and iconic texts such as Mark Twain's *The Adventures of*

*Huckleberry Finn*, Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* and Fenimore Cooper's, *Leatherstocking Tales* alongside many others, in collections such as *An End to Innocence* (1955), *No! In Thunder* (1960), the all famous *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960), one of the three critical books that every researcher of American literature keeps by his side along with R W B Lewis's *The American Adam*, (1955) and F O Matthiessen's *The American Renaissance* (1941), *Waiting for the End* (1964) *Freaks* (1971), *The Inadvertent Epic: From Uncle Tom Cabin's to Roots* (1979); and *What was Literature? Class Culture and Mass Society* (1982), to list just a few out of the expansive oeuvre of his writings, Fiedler had administered a brisk tremor to the stolid and snug world of American literary establishment. As shall be seen, the paper seems to have quite naturally spread itself into two sections, Section I in its starting points introduces the iconoclastic Fiedler and presents the Fiedlerian thesis of opening the register of American literature outside its boundaries. Section II analyses Fiedler's attempts to re-border the canon leading to a brief summation that looks at the impact of his unconventional ideas on contemporary scholarship and asserts the significance of the critical and unconventional credo today.

## I

American literature is distinguished by a number of "dangerous and disturbing books in its canon," he once wrote, "and American scholarship by its ability to conceal this fact" (Timberg 2008). Having received enough critical heft for his path-breaking critical text *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960), Fiedler makes it impossible for us ever to read the classics of literature in the same way again. The field of literary scholarship has certainly changed a great deal since 1948 when his essay "Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey!" was published. In it, he argued that American culture during the frontier era had been dominated by the male quest to flee domesticity as seen in the story "Rip Van Winkle" or the other in the peace and tranquility of Thoreau's *Walden*. He pointed to the recurrent motif of white heroes forming extremely close emotional bonds with men of other races. While European novelists of the 19th century wrote about the problems surrounding heterosexual love, classic American literature, according to him, projected a fantasy of interracial harmony in a world without women – 'overt homosexuality' (1960, 4) as he put it. To a later generation, it seems impossible to overlook the erotic overtones of, say, Ishmael's relationship with Queequeg, the Polynesian bunkmate, in *Moby-Dick* or Huck Finn with Nigger Jim in Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Like all criticism of real consequence, ridding *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* of its Fiedlerian stamp proved difficult, if not possible. But as Winchell documents, the argument was quite upsetting at that time. He cites the greeting of Ernest Hemingway upon meeting Fiedler: "Do you still believe that st-st-stuff about Huck Finn?" (Ernest Hemingway to Fiedler 349) As early as the late 1940s, Fiedler addresses both white racism and the taboo subject of male homosexuality, and makes clear the *cultural* and *political* terrain of his analysis. "[P]rior to Fiedler; few critics had discussed classic American literature in terms of race, gender, and sexuality" (Winchell 53).

On a similar experimental index, Fiedler called out for an opening up of literature beyond the library and the academia. He propagated a counter culture which accommodated alongside the high mimetic mode of art, its obverse - the low mimetic - amply demonstrated

in several of his path-breaking, non-conformist texts. Just like the structuralists who assert that all myths throughout the world have a family resemblance, Fiedler points out, "Literature" is never just "words on the page," but is, "primordial images of archetypes or myths...that can pass out again easily into any other medium. They can be portrayed on stage; they can be painted; they can be sculpted in stone; they can be turned into stained glass windows; they can be carved in soap" (Srivastava 68). Fiedler suggests that one way of elaborating on this insight might be to treat literature as a certain kind of *myth*, the property not of a hegemonic class or an educated and officially ordained clerisy, but of the people themselves. In this way, Fiedler tried to legitimise spaces beyond the literary: science fiction and movies, comic books, graphic novels, soap opera studies, media and film studies and other popular art forms. By building an edifice of 'protest' literature, he challenged the hegemonic discourse by subverting the ghettoization of literature into conservative categories.

In fact, in his attempt to *Cross the Border-Close the Gap* (1971) and build bridges between *Avant Garde* and *Kitsch*, he indulged in a process of recovery of the neglected and the lost. His resuscitation of Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep* (1934) 'the most neglected book of the past 25 years,' (Richard 294) along with the re-institution of the ghettoized canon such as *The Lime Twig* (1961) by John Hawkes, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe, Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* and *Roots* by Alex Haley proves that Fiedler enjoys excluding the obvious and thrusting his uncommon. His deconstruction of the American canon included the marginal voices leading to an inclusivist and selective thesis, which though gave enough space to the outsiders, strangers and others but led Irving Howe among others, to accuse Fiedler of "... simply ignoring those writers and books that might call his thesis into question" and to remark that "... what Fiedler disregards ... is awesome" (Reising 132). Fiedler attempts to understand America his way and presents a multi-pronged thesis on American culture: the American novelistic tradition as different from its prototype European ancestors; American writers' inability to deal with alienation within their culture as exemplified in their contradictory relationship with Jews, natives and blacks; and his attempts to open up the canon to include the mass and the popular, the neglected and the lost; alongside reinstatement of a feminine tradition of the American novel.

By stating a devastatingly bold thesis about American literature and culture, two paradoxically different things can be uncovered: firstly, Fiedler busted the initial ideological heritage of the munificent spirit of 'progress' and 'city upon a hill' concept in numerous ways. He rewrote the historical narrative of racism, color and emancipation with a new pen. On a psychopathic register, through his unique theory of the unconscious, Fiedler imprinted his own myths of the white, black and the red, what later critics such as Deborah Madsen and Donald Pease threaded together in a thesis not uniquely different from Fiedler's. His writings suggest interdisciplinary enquiry with the twin aim of offering linkages and transcultural connections between different literatures no longer trussed by national, linguistic, or disciplinary boundaries. Further on, often, hegemony and hierarchy that rule comparative literature scholarship came under his minute scrutiny and was criticised.

Not one to hedge his ideas, Fiedler, in his critique of racial and sexual discrimination, and in his heralding of equal rights for both blacks and queers, has been much ahead of his time and he approaches these charged issues through the novels then at the core of the American literary curriculum (Harrison 2008).

## II

As a starting point to this section, I wish to bring Steven Kellman, who edited, along with Irving Malin, one of the three critical books on Fiedler titled *Leslie Fiedler and American Culture* (1999). He writes:

During a recent sojourn at the American Studies Center in Hyderabad, India, I was shown an extraordinary piece of furniture: [...] Leslie Fiedler Chair.... [D]uring one of his two visits, the illustrious American critic donated an actual chair....[I]t testifies to Fiedler's exalted standing worlds away from Newark, Missoula, and Buffalo [...]

('Introduction', Kellman in Kellman and Malin 7)

The other observation is by Scott McLemee (2002), "Long before the advent of cultural studies, queer theory, disability scholarship, or the phenomenon of the celebrity academic, there was Leslie Fiedler" (Srivastava 176). Both these reflections add to the existing Fiedlerian theses in several pages of masculinities studies and queer theory. David Greven (2009) uses Fiedler's formulations on American masculinity to understand the double-protagonist film, a genre in which two male protagonists, each played by a film star, vie for narrative dominance. Queer theorists such as Joseph Boone, Wayne Koestenbaum, Gail Reuben, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick remain indebted to Fiedler's perspicacity about white male fantasies of a dark male beloved. It is true that his writings underscore an understanding of cross-racial and homosexual desire. On the feminist register, the famed Susan Gubar finds Fiedler a 'kinsman' of feminists. She calls Fiedler, 'the father of us all' who 'adumbrated the first stage of feminist criticism,' and who was an active participant in the second step of feminist criticism that Showalter medically names 'gyno-criticism' that is, the period of recovery where texts that have been neglected or devalued because composed by women received new interpretative appreciation. (Gubar 167). According to her, Fiedler embarked on a series of projects that [he] may not have set out to do but nevertheless ended up offering, "an analysis of women's function in American fiction almost two decades before I and my peer group of feminists in American Studies—Judith Fetterley, Annette Kolodny, Myra Jehlen, and Jane Tompkins— produced comparable contributions" (166-67).

His views on male bonding are much relevant today when sexuality debates are no longer huge conundrums. The sexuality debates on rape and sex that Fiedler had generated regarding the female protagonist of *Gone with the Wind*, Scarlet O Hara, stand validated through an essay that *The New York Times* (February 1995) published "Rhett and Scarlet: Rough Sex or rape?" He wrote *Freaks: Myths and images of the secret self* (1978), ruminations on nature's outsiders such as the monstrous, the alien, the mutant, the deformed and the odd, when not many thought of exploring this dynamic interdisciplinary terrain of gender, sociology, psychology and literary studies. Further, the first-person critical voice in American letters that he proudly invented and supported has become so commonplace today. The third person of criticism has been replaced by a bold assertion of the critic and the critical stance.

Did Fiedler become 'the other' fighting for the 'other?' is a question that has often been asked. It is true that there are not too many practitioners who would name Fiedler as a progenitor or adopt him as a precursor in the field of feminist criticism, queer theory, African American Studies, Native American Studies and Jewish studies to name a few. At

best, he is seen as “a vaguely embarrassing because unpredictable, irreverent, irascible second cousin twice removed?” (Kellman and Malin 166). It is often said that Fiedler’s influence on much of contemporary criticism has been so fully absorbed that it is almost invisible. The all-pervasive but diffused influence of Fiedler is well echoed by Schechter who says that, “his [Fiedler’s] ideas and concerns have become common currency among people who haven’t the foggiest notion where they came from.”(133) The most obvious example of this can be found in Hollywood, where every second action movie is a pumped-up version of Leslie’s myth of interracial male bonding---Huck and Jim on Steroids and armed with semi-automatic weapons.(130) Fiedler remains an early pioneer in American cultural studies. Much before the impact of the German Frankfurt School and *The Culture Industry* (1947) had crossed the Atlantic, Fiedler championed hybrid, mass, and low cultures, a hallmark of many populist, post-Marxist analyses. His views on the canon are irreplaceable and find an echo, “If we accept the canon for pragmatic purposes, then it must be malleable enough to facilitate new names and texts to compete with (Classen 2) Today, the canon is being revised all the time. Abrehct Classen makes a Fiedlerian case for opening up the canon!

Critics such as Fiedler are in many ways responsible for the experimentation and bold local inclusions made into the pedagogy of English studies in several postcolonial English departments. Fiedler has always championed works that have never been in the canon of high art (*Gone with the Wind*, *Dracula*, and the classic works of science fiction) (Winchell 341). Camille Paglia, who recently wrote the introduction to the new edition of *Love and Death in the American Novel*, said in its blurb “Let’s turn back to Fiedler and begin again” (Winchell 333). He does at any rate mark an unexpected swing of the pendulum. Fiedler is a writer out of the ordinary, worth more than a single glance. As someone, having inaugurated the *discourse* on postmodernism, he will always be known as an early champion of multiculturalism and one who singlehandedly assaulted the elitist literary canon to help build a counter canon. On this, rests the contemporary relevance of Leslie Fiedler.

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**From *Homo Sapiens* to *Homo Sapiens Technologicus*: A Transhumanist Reading of  
Daniel H. Wilson's *Special Automatic***

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*Abstract*

*In the contemporary times, humanity's relationship with technology is evolving expeditiously mainly because of the exponential advancement in technology. This has eventually led to the development and progress being more rampant and noteworthy in this era than any other time in history. The increasingly evolving level of scientific discoveries and unprecedented technological advancements in the current era exhibit the exigency of accepting machines as an indispensable part of human life. The recent milestones achieved in robotics, artificial intelligence, genetics, neurosciences, cloud computing and cybernetics are all set to alter the manner and mode of human existence. These are being used to radically alter and upgrade the human species thereby transcending all their physical and cognitive limitations. The phenomenon of transition of the human species has been termed as transhumanism. Transhumanism serves to be a critical transitional phase wherein humankind sheds its baseline form and embraces an enhanced mode of existence. This paper tries to bring out such transhumanist concerns that get depicted in the short story "Special Automatic" written by Daniel H. Wilson.*

*Keywords: humanity, technology, transhumanism, bio-technology, enhancement, automation.*

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From time immemorial, humankind has felt an irresistible urge to master the surroundings and establish its sovereignty over the other species. However, there is a possibility that in doing so humanity may end up being a victim of its own creation. In the contemporary world, technology seems to be at the epicentre and its incessant progress can be said to have changed the existing contours of human life. The relationship of science and technology with man and society is coming increasingly under scanner as the impact of former on the latter is irreversible and unavoidable. This state of affairs can either prove to be useful or destructive or both. Numerous advances in technology have greatly enhanced the quality of human life. The new emerging technologies are working consistently to achieve the human desire of well-being and super-longevity. The desire of overcoming mortality is as old as humanity itself, since human beings are prone to diseases and their biological bodies come with an expiry date.

Recently, various unprecedented scientific achievements have been made in this regard and human beings have devised cures for innumerable diseases that were considered

incurable in the past. In addition to this, profound progress has been made in the field of biotechnology including prosthetics, medical implants and other bionic surgeries implying that human capabilities are no longer restricted to their biological limitations and their abilities can be enhanced technologically. The advanced technology of implants and prosthetics can prove to be helpful in correcting certain innate failings and flaws of biologically restricted human beings. It can enable a deaf to hear, a blind to see, an epileptic to have control over his convulsions and one with any physical deformity or mental illness to function and behave normally. These improved and enhanced abilities of human beings as well as the dangers inherent in them are explored under the emerging discipline of transhumanism. The theorists of transhumanism hold the view that the consistent progress in science and technology will eventually enable the world to move beyond the conventional notion of what it means to be a human. In the words of Nick Bostrom, transhumanism is an, “intellectual and cultural movement that affirms the possibility and desirability of fundamentally improving the human condition through applied reason, especially by developing and making widely available technologies to eliminate aging and to greatly enhance human intellectual, physical, and psychological capacities” (“The Transhumanist FAQ” 5). He further adds that it is a “study of the ramifications, promises, and potential dangers of technologies that will enable us to overcome fundamental human limitations, and the related study of the ethical matters involved in developing and using such technologies” (6).

Transhumanism, therefore, envisions an improvised world where humans will be transformed with the help of technology. This scenario is quite clearly depicted by contemporary American author Daniel H. Wilson in one of his short stories titled *Special Automatic*. Wilson is a Robotics Engineer and science fiction writer born in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He belongs to the Cherokee tribe of Oklahoma. Wilson graduated from the Booker T. Washington High School in the year 1996 and earned his bachelor’s degree in Computer Science from the University of Tulsa in 2000. He has earned two master degrees, one in Robotics and the other in Machine Learning. Wilson finished his Ph.D. in Robotics from the Robotics Institute at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. His writing career started with the publication of non-fictional works. His first work *How to Survive a Robot Uprising: Tips on Defending Yourself Against the Coming Rebellion* was published in 2005. His first fictional work titled *A Boy and His Bot*, belonging to the genre of children’s fiction, was published in 2011. In the same year, his first techno-thriller *Robocalypse* was also published and became the New York Times bestseller. In addition to all his works of non-fiction and fiction, Wilson also has to his credit a collection of short stories named *Guardian Angels and Other Monsters* (2018) comprising of fourteen short stories. It is a fantastic and fascinating collection of stories exploring complicated emotional and intellectual landscapes as artificial intelligence intersects with human life. It weighs the possibilities of how artificial intelligence can either enhance human capabilities or destroy them.

*Special Automatic* is one of the short stories of Daniel H. Wilson anthologised in the collection *Guardian Angels and Other Monsters*. It deals with a seventeen years old malformed boy named James who lives with his elder brother Mike in a dilapidated tenement. Mike is a collector of drug money and has a rare .38 special automatic handgun which he uses to evoke fear in people and extract money from them. Mike ill-treats James,



beats him regularly and calls him a ‘retard’ as the latter suffers from epilepsy. In order to control his debilitating seizures, James has a neural web implanted in his brain. James was small for seventeen, on the verge of adulthood and unaware of it. He stank of stale sweat, hunched over a soldering iron at a desk in a sweltering bedroom. Nobody had ever told him much. James often forgot to blink. He had a medical device called a neurostimulator sunk into his brain like a spider web of metal, its batteries housed in a flesh-colored lump of plastic tucked behind his right ear. Anticipating the brain’s rhythms, the implant prevented the metallic haze of a seizure from descending over him. (*Guardian Angels and Monsters* 246)

James becomes an emblem of technologically improvised human being whose otherwise debilitating medical condition had rendered him unable to coordinate with as well as respond to his surroundings. This is evident of the fact that the prodigious progress in the field of technology has reached a point where the tools that are created by humans have virtually entered their bodies and become a part of it. Wilson has a strong feeling that transcending biological limitations will certainly give human species a substantial spur towards attaining a more disembodied and perspicacious life. Gregory Stock, in his book *Metaman: The Merging of Humans and Machines Into a Global Superorganism* (1993), predicts a revolutionary and seismic change occurring as an outcome of union between man and machine. This change will amplify normal human qualities beyond recognition leading to the emergence of a new progeny of super intelligent beings which Stock calls ‘the Metaman.’ In support of his argument, he writes, “Both society and the natural environment have previously undergone tumultuous changes, but the essence of being human has remained the same. Metaman, however, is on the verge of significantly altering human form and capacity” (Stock, 33). Gregory Stock, like many transhumanists, envisions a phase of profound transformation wherein all the conventional and traditional frameworks will be subverted, thereby, bringing about a sea change in the conception of what it means to be a human. Gregory Stock shares the concerns of Wilson, as depicted in the short story under analysis, in the following words:

As the nature of human beings begins to change, so too will concepts of what it means to be human. One day humans will be composite beings: part biological, part mechanical, part electronic. This idea may conjure images of unworldly androids, but the transition will not be as jarring as we might imagine. Replacing or modifying parts of the human body is already commonplace, and neither false teeth nor artificial knees make people feel less human. [...] No one can know what humans will one day become, but whether it is a matter of fifty years or five hundred years, humans will eventually undergo radical biological change. Competitive pressures within Metaman will ensure the spread of any useful ways of significantly enhancing human capabilities.” (Stock, 34)

Even though, Gregory Stock maintains a transhumanist stance by pointing out the positive aspects of human-technology interface and sounds to be at home with the prospects of biologically enhanced human beings, but his statement betrays a possible fear of humanity being irreversibly altered if not completely obliterated with the competitive employment of scientifically advanced artificial intelligence. Similarly, in the short story under consideration, the implant proves to be significantly useful in enhancing James’s abilities and in spite of his biological limitations. With the assistance of the implant, in the darkness

of abandonment, neglect and hate, James eventually succeeds in making an incredible mechanical entity which he names 'Special Automatic', after the name of the handgun that his brother possesses:

*Special Automatic.* A humanoid form hung from a hook James had mounted to the wall. It was much taller than he was, its long, slender limbs crafted from parts James had found on the street or in dumpsters. They were the heavy-duty public street cleaners, and of course the ubiquitous government mail-delivery walkers, and sometimes advertising machines that stumbled into the neighbourhood, lost. They were constantly getting bashed into pieces, shoved into the gutters, or dragged behind cars by the neighbourhood boys. When their fun was over, James would emerge, scuttling from piece to piece, considering each bit of metal or plastic before dropping it into a trash bag straining over his shoulder. The machine had come together in Frankensteinian fashion, the pieces coalescing undisturbed in this moody, forgotten bedroom. And now, it had finally manifested itself, great head hanging, face pointed at the floor, massive shoulders hunched and long arms spread wide. (*Guardian Angels and Monsters* 248-49)

The monster that James creates symbolises human desire to be more powerful than ever. It is pertinent to note that the Special Automatic is a scientific corollary to the neuro-implant embedded in James' brain. If transhumanists celebrate the human enhancement in the face of biological limitations and handicaps, the posthumanists harbour an imminent fear of machines taking over human beings in terms of maintaining their own progeny completely independent of human agency. The production of Special Automatic, with the help of the neuro-implant, is a vivid pointer towards what apocalyptic post-humanists strongly believe in. Even though the goal of medical technology was to help the people with biological limitations to reach a normal level of functioning but with the latest advancements in biotechnology, people with limitations are becoming equipped with super abilities.

Despite being biologically restricted, James creates his own guardian in order to protect himself and overthrow the ones who have mistreated him. Special Automatic even threatens Mike to stay away from James. Because of being socially isolated for since early childhood, James develops a special bond with the machine that is ready to do anything on his command. This unusual bond between a human and a machine is reflective of the fact that the rapid growth in technology has changed the relationship that a user shares with a device. The more influential and smarter the machines are getting, the more fascinated and attached human beings are becoming to them. David Levy expresses the same concern in the following words:

Imagine a world in which robots are just like us (almost). A world in which the boundary between our perceptions of robots and our perceptions of our fellow humans has become so blurred that most of us treat robots as though they are mental, social, and moral beings. A world in which the general perception of robot creatures is raised to the level of our perception of biological creatures. When this happens, when robot creatures are generally perceived as being similar to biological creatures, the effect on society will be enormous. It will be as though hordes of people from a hitherto-unknown and far-off land have emigrated to our shores, a people who behave like us in many ways but who are very clearly different. (303)

James' *Special Automatic* is akin to the alien that David Levy invokes, perhaps the penultimate stage of machines that possess emotions, perceptions, allegiance etc as present day humans do. The fact of James having an implant is not the only reason why he develops the Special Automatic but rather the expediency necessitated by his social ostracization by his brother and other young boys of the vicinity. The machine doesn't only protect him against the others but also resolves the issue of his loneliness by providing him company and a sense of belongingness. It is quite perceptible that the complicatedness of human relationships precipitates the tendency of seeking machine or non-human camaraderie among the people. The users project their desires on the machines, and the receptivity and responsiveness of the machines in turn make them a great refuge for those who are flummoxed by the complexity and vexation of human relationships. In the story, the character of James, who is forsaken by the world and has no connection with people, finds refuge in his machine 'Special Automatic.'

In order to test the ability of his creation, James performs certain experiments on it and after realising its potential, he ultimately decides to use Special Automatic to work his way up the ladder by surpassing his brother. The story reads, "With the comfortable bulk of Special Automatic looming over him, he sat down in Mike's La-Z-Boy. Lower lip twitching, James thought about what he wanted to do next. And for the first time, he had the power to do it" (*Guardian Angels and Other Monsters* 269). Special Automatic forces Mr. Connor to give James the charge of his elder brother Mike. For the sake of survival, Mr. Connor agrees to make James the local crime boss. James determines to seek revenge from all of those who have bullied him and extract money from them. The story clearly reflects that the cutting edge technology can prove to be fruitful and has also given a remarkable hope to the ones suffering from any illness or disability but it can also entail serious repercussions. The protagonist in the story has got a medical implant in order to get cured but it eventually turns him into a sort of criminal. Transcending biological limitations will certainly give human species a substantial spur towards attaining a more disembodied and perspicacious life but the characters like James and their desire to become powerful project an alarming danger towards which the contemporary society is moving consistently. E.P. Zehr, a professor of neuroscience, imagines the possible birth of a transformed human following the incessantly developing technology by stating that:

As we move forward in the fields of neuroprosthetics and neural enhancement that truly are still in their infancy, I suggest it is critical that we allocate some of our attention and some mindfulness on what the future may hold. Through our use of technology, we are potentially at the threshold of scientific advances that could fundamentally change who we are as a species. Will our species of *homo sapiens* (literally wise men) use our technology to transform our species into technical man—*homo sapiens technologicus*—a new subspecies deliberately modified and tailored by its own hand? Currently our technologies are still relatively nascent and typically applied in the case of neurorestoration. As the field matures, however, to what ends will these technologies be applied, and using what means? I suggest that presently we are on the path toward the superman of Nietzsche by overcoming the limits of our species through application and internalization of our swiftly increasing technological ability. (77)

The similar warning also gets reflected in the short story written by Wilson. It demonstrates that how technological advancement, on one hand, presents a propitious sight of humanity excelling while, on the other, it manifests a despondent image of humanity degrading because of its over reliance on technology. Technology can, therefore, be considered as a double-edged sword or a flame that possesses the capability of providing warmth as well as setting everything on fire. Prof Zehr voices the concerns put forth by futuristic writer like Daniel. H. Wilson particularly the possible outcome of man's penchant for technologically assisted existence. It is the science, in this case, that seems to bring humans to the potential realisation of Nietzsche's 'Superman', not in the particularly Nietzschean sense, though. The possible advent of *homo sapiens technologicus* might either prove to be a boon as an advanced being inhabiting a utopian future or an alien that escapes the orbit of human existence and obliterates it forever.

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## **The Portrayal of Masculinity in *Women* by Henry Charles Bukowski**

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### *Abstract*

*Socialization refers to the conditioning of a person following the set norms of a society, varying from society to society. However, people are also socialized vis-a-vis their gender roles that have been defined for both men and women as a set of instructions guiding their social conduct. While it is argued that the former purpose of this distinction was to facilitate the mental health of both men and women, this became oppressive especially because women felt their roles were oppressive and were designed to subordinate them. As the cognizance of gender equality increased, people realized that roles can be oppressive not only for women but also for men and greater efforts were made to achieve gender equality and create a novel and comfortable space for both the sexes to exist. However, equality cannot be attained by sequestering one sex from the other and it is significant to study the relationship of their codependence to propel our efforts in the right direction. This paper aims to study the depiction of masculinity with the support of the emerging concept of positive masculinity. It will analyse Henry Charles Bukowski's *Women* with the help of Raewyn Connell's concept of different masculinities to analyze masculinity, and unwomen, in collaboration with UNFPA's measures to promote and achieve gender equality.*

*Keywords: Masculinity, Hegemony, Women Empowerment, Gender/Sex Roles, Feminism*

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Charles Bukowski published his semi-autobiographical novel *Women* in 1973. The novel manifests the provisional relationships of the protagonist, Henry Chinaski, with multiple women in the novel's course. The narrator subsumes in the abusive cycle of alcohol, drugs and sex until he begins to discern dreariness in the routine and settles down with a woman called Sara. The prima facie thematic concern of the novel may appear to be a severe disparagement and disregard of women. The anti-feminist criticism of the novel arises from the wanton and self-centered attitude of the protagonist. The novel was published in a time when counter-revolution against the second wave of feminism was mass-and-leading, especially by the conventional menfolk who were precarious about the collapse of their prerogative superiority enjoyed hitherto. This anomaly in social conditions thwarted the novel's unprejudiced reception and labeled it a misogynistic work that advocates male

chauvinism. However, a heedful reading permits a polar analysis. In this research, I am attempting to look at Bukowski's depiction of masculinity and how its positive portrayal facilitates women empowerment in the aforementioned novel.

Masculinity refers to the specific sex roles attributed to men. Masculinity is often socially constructed and could be remodeled as per the milieu through social processes. It is instrumental which is often contested with femininity which is expressive<sup>1</sup>. However, over time a new role of masculinity emerged which encompassed both functions, instrument and expressive which meant practicing emotional reticence for men. And while sex roles were primarily created to promote the mental health, healthy lifestyle of both the sexes, soon enough in the nineties women activists rose against the role division. It was popularized that men have always enjoyed a superior stature relative to women. It was further upheld that women have always occupied a suppressed status which paved an urgent need to reconstruct and redefine feminism of which men were a significant tool.

Masculinity is defined differently by different schools, out of which, the most commonly accepted is given by the proponents of Normative thought as "what men ought to be" (Connell 70) which is an ambiguous definition but, conflating with the Essentialist mode of definition which "clings to the core characteristic of men and suspends men's life on that" (Connell 69) made it more conspicuous. The essentialist theory also supports Freud's theory that men are linked to activity and women to passivity. In conflating the essentialist and normative point-of-views we get the definition of masculinity as something defined by Robert Brannon: 'No Sissy Stuff,' 'The Big Wheel,' 'The Sturdy Oak,' and 'Give 'em Hell.' But Connell argues that normative notions of masculinity are conformed by men to different degrees and there is no scientific way to deem a man unmasculine because nobody can conform to the 'blueprint' of masculinity completely. However, there emerged certain traits which were discussed much more than the others, such as exercising dominance, emotional repression, violence etc and based on these notions Connell gave a hierarchy of masculinities which would be discussed relative to the novel in the research subsequently.

Due to its agile and aggressive traits masculinity was gaining negative connotations. Precisely in an attempt to not cast feminine impression; men were over-conforming to the masculine personality characteristics, which raised the need for a term called, 'Positive Masculinity.' Positive Masculinity as given by Ryon Mcdermott, Brandon Browning and five others in their research, *In Search of Positive Masculine Role Norms: Testing the Positive Psychology Positive Masculinity Paradigm* according to Kiselica and other authors is: "beliefs and behaviors of boys and men that produce positive consequences for self and others . . . learned and internalized through a socialization process in which boys and men develop masculine ways of thinking and behaving that promote healthy development while also fostering a sense of duty to others." (qtd. In Dua et al. 2)

But it was also during this time when counter-revolution of men was started partially because there was a movement ongoing for women and partially because men, akin to women, found the male roles too oppressive and stifling. *Women* is often accused to corroborate the counter- revolution which is a redundant association because the sex theory was devised with the motive of facilitating the roles associated with both sexes not to complicate it further<sup>2</sup>. In the novel, Bukowski neither refutes nor supports either of the movements of the late 1970s. His novel is a more of a reflective account of how the narrator

perceived sex roles in the American milieu of the late ninety-seventies. For Bukowski, both the sexes were equal because he was not concerned with a man or a woman but a human being. However, in striving to express his opinions, he used masculinity as an instrument to achieve gender equality and underpin women empowerment in the novel. Through stimulating steadfastness to accept him and others as they are, Bukowski presents a striking and unconventional manifestation of positive masculinity in the novel which is discussed subsequently.

The protagonist, Henry Chinaski, is an anti-hero of Bukowski, who represents the life and ways of the author on a superficial plane. The physical appearance of Chinaski is neither extraordinary nor stereotypical to American standards. Chinaski is an old man with not a lot of physical vigor and heat: "The scars were there, the alcoholic nose, the monkey mouth, the eyes narrowed to slits..." (Bukowski 13). Chinaski is haunted by the constant fear of death that follows old age and exhibits unrestrained sexual indulgence. The physical appearance of Chinaski, along with his destitute and disorganized life, as well as his old age all are imperative to portray that while men enjoy a superior status in the society as compared to women, not all men are powerful. It is a common misconception that male bodies are inherently more aggressive and dominative than female bodies. However, Connell argues in her book that there is very little sociobiological difference between the male and the female bodies and that brain is hardwired to produce the differences in bodily mechanisms. By reversing the physical strengths of man and woman: "She was in a spitting rage, snarling, her lips pulled back. She was like a leopardess. I looked down at her. I felt safe with her on the ground" (39), Bukowski supports Connell's argument that biological determinism creates group differences<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, we also see that exhaustive masculine appearance with age has created a 'gender vulnerability,' as Connell calls it, in Chinaski and to overcome this vulnerability Chinaski must double his efforts to meet the standards of hegemony which can be done through frequent sex but this does not hold in the present scenario<sup>4</sup>.

Chinaski's debauchery is the outcome of estrangement from the womenfolk for a long time: "I was 50 years old and hadn't been to bed with a woman for four years. I had no women friends." (Bukowski 7) This hiatus escalated by an intense urge to find love compels Chinaski to meet many women and thus what on the face appears to be a chauvinistic and anti-feminist tale of male patronization and women belittlement is actually a quest of love and process of healing. It can also be reinforced by the fact that no attempts are made by the anti-hero to glorify and alter his appearance or living conditions though he exhibits a sense of insecurity here and there in the novel. But he does neither compare himself to other men nor pay any heed to the ones superior to him because having lived a long life, our narrator is bestowed with wisdom and though jealous and insecure at various places, our narrator makes no ravenous attempts to display his strength (which he does not possess) to win women, they get attracted to him because of his burgeoning fame, he does not deliberately use it to get women: "I took her in my arms and we began kissing. I couldn't believe my luck. What right had I? How could a few books of poems call this forth?" (90), save for one occasion, when he goes to a poetry reading and is sojourned in an all girls' hostel which turns out unsuccessful. Also, by bringing his emotional side to the front, Chinaski enables the readers to understand male psychology. Men are not unthinking and unfeeling being but the emotional reticence has barred them from expressing their opinions. It is often expected of a

man to take charge of difficult and unfortunate circumstances and to keep their wits about them when they are in trouble. Likewise, it is also expected of them to not cry, as the clichéd phrase goes, ‘Men don’t cry.’ Conversely, Chinaski when lost in woods expresses fear: “I felt fear, real fear” (Bukowski 84) and cries over a woman: “I found myself sitting on the edge of the bed, and I was crying. I could feel the tears with my fingers” (237). In breaking these mores Chinaski also breaks the four rules of masculinity given by Robert Brannon as mentioned above while also displaying a causal indifference toward it.

Moving ahead, the first-person point of view of the novel is always discriminative. And in the case of *Women*, it has been alleged that Bukowski’s narrator keeps the readers ignorant of the thoughts and desires of its female characters. However, it should be taken into account that Bukowski, by portraying Chinaski was attempting to bring to light the common thought-process of men in lieu of the standard thought-process. Contrary to the common notion of men, Chinaski expresses vulnerability: “I walked about feeling worse and worse. Perhaps it was because I had stayed over instead of going home” (Bukowski 236), fear (as mentioned above) and qualms about his behavior. This misconception that the first-person narrative is employed to subjugate and repress the thoughts and choices of female characters are highly biased. By repressing the female characters, Chinaski nowhere attempts to exercise his male dominance. The power-hungry and emotionally impaired presumption of men is not only highly stunted but also pressurizing for men.

It is also momentous that the male characters are either portrayed in poor living conditions (like the protagonist) or as ne’er-do-wells such as Bobbie: “A bland kid who worked in a porno store” (Bukowski 33). The more affluent and young men are presented with a tinge of envy. Bukowski evinces the dog-eat-dog environment in the society of the male. Despite the patriarchy, Bukowski hints at the invisible hierarchy prevalent among men. “That it was men without guilt who made progress in life. Men who were able to lie, to cheat, men who knew all the shortcuts. Cortez. He didn’t fuck around. Neither did Vince Lombardi” (239). He presents the gender norms that govern the men which presume from them certain self-reliance, stoicism, heterosexuality, hyper-sexuality, competitiveness, dominance, power, or aggressiveness as stated by Levant & Richmond. The more meritorious a man is by being masculine, young, strong, and assertive, the higher he stood. Bukowski being old and poor stood almost on the last rung of the ladder. By presenting an atypical protagonist Bukowski attempts to make it explicit that man can also diverge from how they are perceived by the mainstream society based on traditional ideologies.

Furthermore, in *Women*, we notice that Chinaski, despite not adhering to masculine construct exhibits astonishing insouciance: “I was lazy [sic], I didn’t have a god, politics, ideas, ideals. I was settled into nothingness; a kind of non-being, and I accepted it. It didn’t make for an interesting person. I didn’t want to be interesting, it was too hard. What I really wanted was only a soft hazy space to live in [sic], and to be left alone” (Bukowski 104). One of the causes of it could be his fascination with the raw emotions of people which remains the same for both man and woman. We also notice that Bukowski promoted egalitarianism. He manifests gender equality through deliberate attempts to equalize women without compromising their integrity. By mourning for an ex-wife, and a promise of remembrance to a lady (Lillian) whom the narrator meets for only one night, Chinaski refutes the claim of being masculine even on the most fundamental level which defines men as competitive,



reckless, uncaring and unfeeling being. By deviating from the oppressive masculine norms Chinaski creates a new masculine identity which is basically what is required to promote gender equality and restore the original meaning of gender roles that is highly dynamic and assistive to men and women, not the blueprint of how they ought to behave and exist in the world. Also, by educating the readers about the similarities between male and female psychology Bukowski is aiming to bring about a change in the perception of men. By portraying Chinaski as regressive, then unravelling his sentiments:

I was simply letting things happen without thinking about them. I wasn't considering anything but my own selfish, cheap pleasure. I was like a spoiled high school kid. I was worse than any whore; a whore who took your money and nothing more. I tinkered with lives and souls as if they were my playthings. How could I call myself a man? (Bukowski 236)

Bukowski prompts us to think that male transgression may be the consequence of our unrealistic expectations of them. As noted in the book *Men, Masculinities and Changing Power* "changes in both men's and women's knowledge, attitudes and behavior are necessary conditions for achieving the harmonious partnership of men and women" (19). This ardent call of reform in men's role was a new challenge for the world while it was already intrinsic in Bukowski's works because he was solicitous about loving and being loved back. The theory of his life rested on analyzing people and because he was a heterosexual man, he concerned himself with women: "Since I had been born a man, I craved women constantly, the lower the better" (Bukowski 77).

However, by portraying our anti-hero as not so masculine, Bukowski doesn't promote women empowerment which is significant for positive masculinity. It is discernible that Chinaski meets bohemian and unorthodox women. While on the surface it can be argued that Chinaski fell in the group of complicit masculinity, the men of which category accept the masculine standards even if they do not conform to it. Bukowski proves the opposite. He does not engage in any traditional and orthodox display of dominance over his girlfriends as associated with masculinity. Instead, he accepts his vulnerability and inferiority without harming his male ego. Chinaski doesn't feel harmed when a woman outreaches him on any walks of life. Chinaski goes so far as to accept his shortcomings: "I knew she was connecting me with the racetrack people and the boxing crowd, I was with them, I was one of them. Katherine knew that there was something about me that was not wholesome in the sense of the wholesome is as wholesome does. I was drawn to all the wrong thing" (Bukowski 104). As PMCL opines that positive masculinity is inclusive of the positive and encouraging thoughts and demeanor toward women: "some aspects of positive masculinity (as defined by PMCL) could also be thoughts, feelings or behaviors typically towards women" (McDermott et al. 5). This kind of acceptance and subjugation to a woman without being derisive corresponds to equality which in turn corresponds to positive masculinity.

It is of considerable significance and no chance occurrence that all the women in the novel are portrayed as working and independent. Tammie, Lydia Vance, Laura Stanley, Sara, Joanna Dover, De De Bronson, all these women are preponderant in one way or another. Joanna, Dee, Debra are affluent, Tammie, and Lydia wilder, the latter also possessing physical strength, Laura Stanley is beautiful and sophisticated whereas Sara possesses wisdom and sophistication. While a working and independent woman was acceptable in a

reputable society, women like Tammie and Lydia were ostracized. Chinaski's response to their strengths is never negative or condescending:

As I pulled away Lydia kept beating on the car with her fists. When I was clear of her I shoved it into second. I looked in the rearview mirror and saw her standing all alone in the moonlight, motionless in her blue negligee panties. My gut began to twitch and roll. I felt useless, sad. I was in love with her (Bukowski 39).

The casual reception of women's progression and even transgression comes from Chinaski's positive outlook toward women. He promotes equality which has deeper gains both for women and men as stated in *Man, Masculinities and Changing Power*:

In addition to being a more accurate reflection of the range and depth of gains from gender equality, treating men as stakeholders return us to the inherently relational nature of gender. There is a substantial and ever-growing body of evidence that women's increased education, employment, and access to health services is good not only for them, but also for their children, their families, and society as a whole—including men. (24)

Furthermore, Chinaski relocates the power that was so long enjoyed by the men. It is a common notion that men are adulterers and for self-gratification often discard women and that is how they are portrayed in nineteenth and twentieth-century movies, a term to refer to them is 'Playboy.' However, we note that Chinaski has presented and attributed the women with fierce strength and intellect. Hitherto passive, women are provided with new control over menfolk. While Chinaski uses rough diction when addressing women, at no point in his novel does he successfully disparage a woman without getting trounced himself. He also says that the 'New Woman' is capable of both femininity and ruthlessness<sup>5</sup>. As Connell argues that it was a common notion that men exercise violence when they feel powerless to a woman, or when a woman's achievements supersede theirs, men resolve to violent means to restore control and assert old dominance. Thus, to create a paradigm, men need to create more positive masculinities as argued in the research, *In Search of Positive Masculine Role Norms: Testing the Positive Psychology Positive Masculinity Paradigm*, that men who exhibit more positivity (as defined by PPPM) are more likely to be accepting of unconventional and powerful women. While also being more tolerant of negative masculine traits, we see that Chinaski is a positive persona, Bukowski's novel which is so often accused of misogyny is actually a revolutionary work that redefines, reconstructs and from a vantage view provides an unconventional mode of perceiving the roles associated with men and women.

Moving ahead, to promote an unconventional <sup>1</sup>thought, Bukowski resorted to a groundbreaking expression which, even though does not make his works seem highly rhetorical, is nevertheless not dampened and does not miss its mark. Bukowski dismisses the hierarchy among men but he carefully keeps the jealousy alive because even if all men were equal, jealousy, which is a basic human sentiment would continue to persist. He defines a new man persona and lifts the women to the status of a traditional hegemonic man. We have often seen that Chinaski is discontented with his 'monkey mouth' and his appearance (however proud of his legs) and often questions his inadequacies as a man, and while, at the same time not looking 'feminine,' depicts that men who are fond of shopping, dressing up, and fashion are not subordinate masculinities. Bukowski by giving Chinaski a wholesome

personality from his liking for racetracks and cars to his consciousness about his looks also conveys that men have as much femininity in them as much as women have masculinity in them. While afflicting Chinaski with masculine habits such as drinking and debauchery, racetracks and boxing, he does not let it affect or inferiorize women. Through this Bukowski strongly asserts that even if masculinity is present, it does not mean the absence of empowered women. A woman, like Tammie, has the right to fight, like Dee Dee and Debra has the right to be independent and be affluent like Sara is bestowed with wisdom and like Lydia contains savagery in her. A woman does not have to be any one of them, but she is each one of them. Likewise, men take a step toward positive masculinity when they are not critical of an unconventional and strong woman but can accept that she can sustain immeasurable strength, both physical (like Lydia) and intellectual (like Sara). *Women* also conveys that men are not traditionally 'sturdy oaks' but feeling and expressive beings capable of rationality and acceptance.

### Notes

Discussed by R.W Connell in her book *Masculinities*. Expressive roles are those roles that mean passive nurturing and providing care whereas instrumental role is to act as a means for action or process. While the former role was preserved exclusively for females, the latter was confined to men.

<sup>2</sup> Discussed by R.W Connell in her book *Masculinities*. Sex Roles are roles attributed to both the sexes.

<sup>3</sup> Discussed in R.W Connell's book called *Masculinities*. Biological determinism is the belief that human behavior is conditioned by either their genes or environmental factors. Group differences refer to the differences between genders, ethics etc. Connell argues that biological determination does not provide evidence for the social positioning of men and women.

<sup>4</sup> Discussed by R.W Connell in her book *Masculinities*. Connell describes the relationship between men's bodies and activity. Once the activity is lost men succumb to gender vulnerability because bodily performance symbolizes masculinity.

<sup>5</sup> The term was first used by Sarah Grand in her article to conceptualize a woman seeking change and independence

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**Death of the American Dream and Birth of the New Woman: A Case Study  
of Anne Tyler's *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant***

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*Abstract*

*Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant by Anne Tyler is an exploration of the material world that constituted the American Dream for the white settlers of the continent. The fulfilment of the dream meant that an identity of the American men was getting defined leading to a philosophical analysis of the concrete El Dorado. This attainment meant social transformations which led women also to pursue their independent identities. These transformed beings held themselves in the patriarchal framework which had perhaps deeply strengthened through the American Dream. The materially satisfied men easily hardened themselves towards family relationships to the detriment of women and children. The materialism of an American Dream, though historically prior, became a transformative factor as the philosophical question of women's identity that was being raised and discussed vigorously. Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant shows the journey of a woman who adapts to her husband's lifestyle and offers him a chance to live his dream. But the withdrawal of the husband from the bond of marriage forces the wife to transgress the patriarchal law and take autonomous decisions regarding her identity. Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant shows Beck, the father and Cody, the son relating strongly to the power of the American Dream in the material and abstract sensing. Jenny, the daughter has her mother work hard at the material stages and uses the mother's work as a stepping stone in her own journey towards finding her identity as the New Woman. Thus, the feminine describes a part of continuity in its quest unlike the masculine which is doomed to discreteness in its existence. Anne Tyler's novel employs these factors in narrating the family saga of the Tulls, especially that of Pearl as substantial part of the New Woman.*

*Keywords: Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant, Anne Tyler, American Dream, New Woman, identity quest.*

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The continent on which Columbus landed, and the Pilgrim Fathers another century later, which was eventually to become the United States of America, was at least seventy times the size of the little island state, England. This can be a mind boggling feature but could easily also be symbolic of sheer vastness and the sense of freedom, this vastness can

bring with it. This encounter with vast freedom could itself be the genesis of a dream of God's own plenty. If allied with the variety and abundance of ecological treasure, the dream could only enlarge into a vast panorama uncircumscribed by any human imagination. This physicality and visibility of limitless stretches of treasure which energized and drove the settlers' maybe called the great American Dream. I choose the concrete physical element because without this concrete element there wouldn't possibly have arisen any kind of a driving energy which could later attract accretions of moral considerations.

Allen Ginsberg in the poem "America" speaks  
I won't write my poem till I'm in my right mind.

America when will you be angelic? (lines 7-8)

He is alarmed by a powerful and aggressive America from whom he demands an answer to the question "America when will we end the human war?" (Ginsberg 4). Ginsberg's innocent questioning in "America" is bound to call forth moral visions from such like Jefferson, Franklin, Lincoln, Truslow Adams and Martin Luther King Junior. This amalgam of freedom to dream wealth without frontiers, gold without limits and moral dimensions without responsibility of compulsory realization may be the real ground of the American Dream.

American Dream is a concept that has developed from the seventeenth century onwards to fit according to the demands of a particular age. Its beginning can be dated back to the English settlement in Virginia in 1607. The colonization that took place in Jamestown and Plymouth is the first case in the transition of American heritage. After that, the constant arrival of the Europeans and the English, searching for gold, land, furs, etc. greatly increased their desire to ride into the West of the continent. This underpins the creation of the myth of Eldorado far into the continent. The Europeans and the Spanish conquistadors, hunting for a new world, a better life and perhaps a golden utopia, were sufficiently enchanted to go in search of Eldorado, which was believed to be the land of Gold which that laid in yet another region of America. The relentless exploiting of the West as a result of its availability of vast lands; and its use for the material gain created an impediment against leisure and formulated incessant hard work as the passion, for begetting unlimited profit. It further created a philosophy among men that combined "individualism and political democracy ... as their ideals. These were the traits which were revitalized over and over again as the frontier moved westward, eventually creating an American way of life and thought that was distinct" (*America's Frontier Heritage* Billington 3). This gave birth to the American Dream that remained evident in the lives of individuals who embodied hard work, persistence, achievements and individuality in their journeys from "rags to riches". R.W.B. Lewis (*The American Adam* 1955) speaks of the American Adam as the hero/ protagonist of most American dreamers. He must learn to cope with his freedom and the loneliness. It implies

The Adamic hero is the equivalent ... [of the chief protagonist] in the long tradition of classical drama. The telling distinction is one of strategic distance: the distance at the outset between the hero and the world he must cope with. For the traditional hero is at the center of that world, the glass of its fashion, the symbol of its power, the legate of its history. But the American hero as Adam takes his start outside the world, remote or on the verges; its power, its fashions, and its history are precisely the forces he must learn, must master or be mastered by... the hero of the new world has no home to begin with, but he seeks one to. (128)

This American Dream gave a large fillip by the mobility of the immigrants and their efforts at exploration; it was also evident in the life of the founding fathers. Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* reflects the upward mobility that he approaches with his hard work and enthusiasm. His struggle imbues the spirit of individualism and self-reliance among Americans. This was further expounded by Thomas Jefferson in "The United States Declaration of Independence", where he says that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" (34). Befitting these views of equality and "the pursuit of happiness" all Americans were seeking to fulfill the great American Dream. Jefferson played a significant role in the expansion of the present day United States into the West with his Declaration, generating an expansionism among his people. The materiality of this expansionist vision of wealth and well being is precisely the value I had chosen at the beginning of this paper, to associate strongly with the American Dream and this dream would never have been possible without the dazzling visions of unlimited wealth that anyone could own in the pursuit of happiness. The oral additions came into this concrete framework as a justificatory afterthought, or a truly responsible intellectual and philosophic dimension is in many ways extraneous to the contentions here. A celebration of the Truslow Adams' moral dimension to the American Dream is certainly in order, though not naively incognizant of the sheer physical bases of most such dreams.

It was long before the recognition of the term "American Dream" that there was an acknowledgement of it not only in the events that had taken place, but also in literary texts. As in Karl Marx's view, there is a perception gaining ground that the American manners have tended to create a disparity in society. It builds on hankering among individuals to work hard in order to accumulate wealth but ignores the fact that not everyone is capable of becoming rich. The idea of the Dream created class distinctions in American society rather than unifying it. Mike Davis, the Marxist, gave the crux behind the flaws that prevail in the American social system in the book *Prisoners of the American Dream* saying that "the political incorporation of the industrial proletariat was predestined even before its birth by the very structure of American culture- the lack of feudal class struggles, the hegemony of a Lockean world-view, the safety valve of the frontier, and so on" (6). Thus, we see the society split into the bourgeoisie and the proletariats in America, where the capital lies primarily in the hands of the bourgeoisie, whereas the working class constitutes the dreamers who work hard, thinking of the American Dream that stands for equality and happiness.

Lincoln, who firmly believed in philosophy of the Declaration of Independence, fought for the rights of slaves and introduced democracy as an essential element of the American constitution. He asserted that "most governments have been based practically, on the denial of the equal rights of men, as I have, in part, stated them; ours began, by affirming those rights" (Lincoln, *Fragment of a Speech by Abraham Lincoln on the Conflict between Slavery and Republican Government*). He brings back to America, its actual intention of a moralistic approach behind the American Dream to achieve the vision of an egalitarian nation. These protestations gave rise to the liberation of slaves as well as the working class. The recently acquired sense of freedom provided them the strength to pursue the American Dream. And for the middle classes, the American Dream further meant improvement in their material well being. In a symbolic sense, it serves as a catalyst for the discovery of land and gold, aligning traditionally with the concepts of the Frontier, Westward movement and the

gold rush. Later, the scenario was provided an ethical edge through the efforts of Lincoln; and the description of the American Dream given by Truslow Adams that included both moral and economic facets of the term stating it as

that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position. (Adams; *James Truslow Adams papers, 1918-1949*)

This opinion of Adams seems to have stemmed from Karl Marx's understanding of America. Adam's view of the American Dream is a grand moral vision wherein every individual has equal opportunities. There is a human greed in operation, though not enmity. It's an individual avarice to strike gold. And this individualized greed in the civilized America brings us to the moral point of view that justifies the material point of view; but it has a moral implication for social development which will be borne out by the constitution. Consequently, when Adams mentions 'for each according to [his] ability' we are compelled to think of "Marx, because his materialistic view of history claimed not only (a) the universality of capitalist development but also (b) the inherent dependence of culture and politics on economics and society. America appeared to contradict both of these points..." (Weiner *Karl Marx's Vision of America: A Biographical and Bibliographical Sketch*). Since then, ideology of the American Dream meant to define the material wealth. It was later complemented with the moral well being of the individual and the State.

In *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*, Beck Tull, at the age of twenty four, seems to have acquired wealth as a salesman and the next thing he aims to achieve is a wife. On meeting Pearl, who is thirty, Beck began to court her initially with "chocolates and flowers and then – more serious- pamphlets describing the products of the Tanner Corporation" (*Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* 6). He fits into what Austen claims to be the prospective intent of a man for a marital relationship in her novel *Pride and Prejudice* that "it is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (3). Pearl, an orphan, is threatened by the society's mentality that considers an unmarried woman as a liability. She is offered college education by her uncle as "he feared having to support her forever: a millstone, an orphaned spinster niece tying up his spare bedroom" (*Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* 5). Her relatives began thinking that she will be an 'old maid'. So, she seeks stability and happiness through marriage with Beck and is eventually entrapped in the system. She gets involved in making a family and looking after her children without even realizing that with Beck's constant transfers, "she'd been cut off from most of her relatives" (*Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* 7). And later as the family grows, she is forced to think that "this was not a person she could lean on, she felt- this slangy, loud-voiced salesman peering at his reflection with too much interest when he tied his tie in the mornings... a shirt pocket full of pencils, pens, ruler, appointment book, and tire gauge, all bearing catchy printed slogans for various firms" (*Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* 8). Beck is rather in hard pursuit of more common pleasure and adequate resources to fulfill his dream and eventually leaves his family. The dynamics of this



relationship between Beck and Pearl constitutes the moral centre of the novel. He describes his experiences as a traveling salesman to his abandoned family by the end of the novel, after his wife's death

A salesman's life has a lot of action, know what I mean? Lot of activity. Oftentimes now it doesn't seem there's quite enough to keep me busy. But I do a bit of socializing, cardplaying. Got a few buddies at my hotel. Got a lady friend I see.... this is a really fine lady; she puts a lot of stock in me. And you understand I mean no disrespect to your mother, but now that she's gone and I'm free to remarry ...  
(*Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* 358)

Beck does not believe in the mystical facets of the American Dream. He has achieved materiality but his accomplishment of the American Dream here is in no way comparable to Truslow Adams' vision of the dream in which he creates life as 'better and fuller' with the material wealth in hands. Rather, it complicates the relationship between Beck and Pearl, forcing Beck to lead an individual's life after being pressurized by the responsibility of managing his family. Beck's predicament is synonymous with Willy Loman's, who also suffers from an identity crisis and is unable to associate with himself. Willy was a true believer that "the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead" (*Death of a Salesman* Miller 23). Beck, too, was seen as highly absorbed with his appearance, and Pearl apprehends that she could not depend on him to take care of her and her children. She appears as a characteristic New Woman as she struggles for sustenance and survival, even while living with Beck- "she patched a crack, glazed a window, replaced two basement stair treads... even in the old days, she had done such things; Beck was not very handy. 'This whole, entire house is resting on my shoulders,' she would tell him,... She knew that she was competent" (*Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*, 12).

Historically, the concept of the American Dream is prior and subsequently we see the emergence of the New Woman but they run neck and neck in the context of the novel. When Beck chose to look towards his freedom and individuality, and Pearl was left in a haphazard condition where she did not just have to look after the children but also work outside the house; we are reminded of the transformation that Sarah Grand shows in her article "The New Aspect of the Woman Question". Introducing the image of the New Woman to the world, Grand observes: "Of old if a woman ventured to be at all unconventional, man was allowed to slander her with the imputation that she must be abandoned, and he really believed it because with him liberty meant license" (273). In *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*, we witness Beck turning his back on Pearl and the children. Similarly, he breaks his liaison with every woman he came across once she made him feel less interesting.

I mean with anyone, any one of these lady friends, I just can't resist a person I make happy... I'd have married six times over, just moving on to each new woman that cheered up some when she saw me, moving on again when she got close to me and didn't act so pleased any more. (*Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* 369)

Beck's detachment impels Pearl to realize her importance and the necessity to look up to herself to fulfil her needs. She transforms as a person and comes to the fore with a different personality. Earlier "she had never been ashamed about taking money from Uncle Seward in the olden days, or from Beck... where she came from, a woman *expected* the men to

provide” (*Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* 23-24). But after Beck’s departure, she ‘dole’ from the society and even her relatives, “she’d been so preoccupied with paying the rent and juggling the budget and keeping those great, clod-footed children in new shoes. It was she who called the doctor at two a.m. when Jenny got appendicitis; it was she who marched downstairs with a baseball bat the night they heard that scary noise” (*Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* 22). All this made Pearl joyful to realize that she had “... made the transition so smoothly that not a single person guessed. It was the greatest triumph of her life” (*Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* 23).

The New Woman is someone who realizes that she does not want to be the image of a head waitress engaging with the family and taking care of children. She went into the coverture of her husband and everything related to her went into man’s protection and she also became property to him and a caretaker of the children. But the law declared that the children were supposed to be in the custody of the father and it is his choice that what he wants to do with them, keep them or leave them. Accordingly, here Beck leaves the children with Pearl who is forced to struggle to survive and to find a new identity; and in the process she also emerges as the New Woman. It is as if the American Dream has taken shape and by the way it also led the woman to realize the negativity of the system. Pearl’s struggles, displays her strength and shows herself as a stronger, better woman with a new identity, a New Woman.

The evolution of a woman from being gentle, compassionate and reposeful to the ‘New Woman’ who does not just possess an understanding of the self but also like Henrik Ibsen’s Nora, “when [she] shut the door behind her, she wasn’t just a woman leaving her family. She was a woman seeking independence from the strictures of society and the rule of men which was placed upon her because of gender. She was the representation of Everyman, illustrating the need of everyone, no matter their background, for freedom. And she was the representation of the unnoticed, underappreciated workers of the world overthrowing the capitalists who took them for granted.” (Chandler *"A Doll House" by Henrik Ibsen: A Marxist and Feminist Analysis - Owlcation - Education*). This emergence of the New Woman is linked with the American Dream. The moral framework of the New Woman is the one that Truslow Adams assigns to the American Dream. The well being of all, he declares, eventually means the welfare of woman also. The New Woman like Adams’ definition begins to emerge only midway through the American Dream. Recent examples of the New Woman are the woman of considerable value such as Hilary Clinton, Michelle Obama and Kamala Harris, the current Vice President. Many such women have achieved professional worth, freedom from the rule of patriarchy and created their self identity. Just as we observe Pearl, who had always been dependent on men, begins to become self sufficient and independent once Beck seeks his individuality during the process of achieving the American Dream. New Woman is the one who struggles through so many challenges and attains the pursuit of happiness that she symbolically becomes the state of well being and happiness. Under these conditions, what the New Woman reflects is not different from the dimension that Truslow Adams brings into the American Dream.

Pearl and Beck’s son Cody is also a man in quest of the great American Dream. He is not unlike his father Beck. Even a day before his mother’s funeral what makes him more conscious is that his father would get to see him “... it would be more than he could manage to drag himself off to work. His success finally filled its purpose. Was this all he had been

striving for- this one brief moment of respect fitting across his father's face?" (*Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*, 358). He suffers from a certain existential dichotomy, burdened throughout his life by the guilt that he was the reason why his father left. However, later when Beck, the father is talks about his materialistic pursuits including a possible wedding, "... Cody struggles to find the appropriate balance between his insecurities and his need for independence, he discovers that he cannot escape his past... 'he would rather die than desert a child of his...' (299). Cody's memory demonstrates one of the first clear steps of progress he makes to overcome his insecurities instead of just dwelling on them. Confronting Beck with questions and resentment about his abandonment allows Cody to tie up the loose ends he has felt his whole life. ... Hearing Beck's regrets leads Cody to realize the value of 'meager handful of advice offered by Beck Tull' (298)... that family is 'all there really is, in the end' (301)'" (Hastings *Suffering and Coping in the Novels of Anne Tyler* 101-102). This strongly suggests that Cody will bring greater responsibility to the American Dream than merely creating immense individual wealth or at least an illusion of wealth and pursuit of happiness. The moral dimension that Truslow Adams and his predecessors brought to the American Dream will shape like Cody and grow much vast into a commonly applicable American Dream in pursuit of people's happiness.

What is left to remark about is the role of Jenny and the New Woman. Jenny, who is married thrice and is still struggling for an identity, represents the next generation after Pearl. She will extend the definitions of the New Woman while Pearl's life is a description of the process of the making of a New Woman; Jenny is almost certainly the finished product within the context of the novel. Assuming that the New Woman is a constantly changing contextual concept, one may conclude that Jenny represents the emergent New Woman of newer feminisms. The marriages she goes through are the marriage of an evolving New Woman and evolving feminism. Therefore, through an analysis of the novel on the basis of thematic, inter-textual and historical concerns, the paper comes to a conclusion that how men have managed to achieve their American Dream that was previously linked with the material aspects and eventually shift to abstractness. Whereas the women never had the desire to lean towards materiality but the men's behavior towards them in the process, made them to realize their self identity further making them the new woman.

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## **Ruth Klüger's *Still Alive* as a Counter-Monument in Timescapes of Memory: A Critique**

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### *Abstract*

*Space is not composed of mere tangible topography of place but is intricately connected with the experience of it firmly placed in time. Even when sometimes memorials fail to capture the crux of this, testimonies and memoirs spatialize memories without taking time out of them. This paper looks into the memory functions of Ruth Klüger's *Still Alive*, the memoir of Holocaust survivor Ruth Klüger and endeavours to emphasise that memoirs prove to be counter-monuments by creating literary chronotopes that are spatial and temporal indicators whose space becomes responsive to the movements of plot, time and history.*

*Keywords: Ruth Klüger, Memorials, Time, Space, Counter- Monuments*

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The Jews collectively as a race, have been hated, persecuted and scattered through all ages, based on various misconceptions. Though the brutalities against the Jews precipitated in Europe around the first half of the twentieth century and culminated in the annihilation of six million European Jewry under the schematised extermination by the Nazis, antisemitism neither started with Hitler nor did it end with him. The Jews were hated by the world owing to the fact that they were singular in many aspects. To begin with, they were followers of Judaism, a monotheistic religion in a pagan world and this made others suspicious of them. They were groundlessly accused of poisoning wells, blood libels, starting wars and were charged with greed, materialism and malice. After the crucifixion of Christ, Jews were additionally castigated as “Christ-killers”. Hitler’s Nazi redemptive antisemitism was based on the ideology of racial inequality that justified and necessitated ethnic cleansing.

‘Holocaust’ is the term used to signify the systematic, state-organised massacre between the years 1939 to 1945 of eleven million people, who did not fit into the Nazi ideology of ideal citizens, out of which six million were Jews. The word ‘Holocaust’ comes from the Greek word *holokauston* meaning “burnt whole” denoting a sacrifice which the Holocaust was not. The destruction of the Jews seeking for their ethnic cleansing was a

meaningless annihilation, which killed two thirds of the European Jewry, displaced millions, scattered families, destroyed the social fabric of the Jewish world resulting in cultural and personal trauma beyond redemption. Though more than seventy five years have passed since the Liberation, the Holocaust continues to cast its bleak long shadow over human consciousness and the lessons from the Holocaust are still to be learnt.

Holocaust literature stands testimony to the heinous crime and across its genres is the motif of an individual's struggle to survive, regain life, meaning, memory and identity. Concerning the Holocaust, *Zachor* or to remember is the need of the hour as the event and its memory recede further into history and the generation of survivors and eyewitness become fewer and frailer. While the importance of remembrance cannot be overemphasised, it also raises questions of the ethics of memory, the right modes of remembering and the dangers of monolithic discourses of commemoration overriding the validity of individual testimony. Deliberations on the ethics of remembering permeate Ruth Klüger's memoir, *Still Alive*.

Ruth Klüger was a child survivor of the Holocaust from Vienna. As a Jewish child in a Nazi-occupied state, Klüger was a victim of dehumanizing anti-Semitism in Austria. Her father, a doctor was deported to an unknown destination where he perished. The death of his father and separation from her brother left unhealable wounds in the young psyche of Klüger. She was forced to move to a cramped ghetto with her mother. Later she was deported to Theresienstadt; to Auschwitz-Birkenau; to Christianstadt and to Gross-Rosen, the horror of each camp staying with her. In February 1954, when the German troops evacuated with the advancing of the Russian troops, Klüger, her mother and four other prisoners escaped. Till October 1947, she lived with her mother in Germany and then obtained immigration visa to United States. Klüger's traumatic experiences of the Holocaust had deep impact on her post-war adult life and American identity. Though she waited for more than fifty years to write her memoir, narrating her experiences was important to her because she believed that only through language she could access the timescapes of her experience and also allow her readers an unequivocal view of her personal witness through the process of memory.

In her memoir, *Still Alive* Klüger reconstructs her lived experience before, during and after the Holocaust and the book is not just an attempt in self-understanding and self-liberation but also serves as a testimony of trauma, time, space and memorialisation. Doreen Massey in her book, *For Space*, identifies space as the product of interrelations constituted through interactions, a sphere of coexisting heterogeneity and as always under construction. She also insists on a multiplicity imbued with temporality. Massey argues, "by injecting temporality into the spatial this also reinvigorates its aspect of discrete multiplicity; for while the closed system is the foundation for the singular universal, opening that up makes room for a genuine multiplicity of trajectories, and thus potentially of voice"(55). She propounds that neither time nor space are reducible to the other; they are distinct. They are, however, co-implicated suggesting a mutual necessity of time and space. Elizabeth Grosz asserts "...space and time exist as a continuum, a unified totality. Time is capable of representation only through its subordination to space and to spatial models"( 95). This inter-relation of time and space is what Klüger laments as lacking in memorial culture. When places of atrocities are redesigned as museums and places of tourist attractions, the space exists devoid of the implications of time thus stripped of their connect with trauma and horror.

For Klüger, memoirs reconfigure time and space together to create a slice of the past that can never be captured in the same intensity by many other modes of remembering. Aleida Assman suggests the inseparability of experience and space and Pierre Nora in his *lieux de memoire* says, “there are *lieux de memoire* (sites of memory) because there are no longer *milieu de memoire* (environments of memory)”. For Klüger, this ‘environment of memory’ is not satisfactorily achieved in memory sites sometimes. She writes, “The various reconstituted concentration camp sites... don’t take you in. They spit you out. Moreover they tell you what you ought to think, as no art or science museum ever does. They impede the critical faculty” (198). In response to this, Klüger recreates spaces through the lens of her subjective experience.

Klüger’s memoir acts as a bridge between personal and collective memory, a vehicle of remembrance and a counter-monument indicative of the reordering of the Holocaust representation in an age of cultural memory. ‘Counter-monument’ is a term coined by James Young to denote modes of memory that remember in the most unconventional fashion. He argues that counter-monuments move away from didactic monuments and appeals to the conscience of the society by inviting them into the message and demanding a different interpretation of the past. In his book, *The Texture of Memory* he asserts that “counter monuments are against the authoritarian propensity in all art that reduces viewers to passive spectators”(28). Counter-monuments resist the idea of a closure and strive to be dialogic and anti-monumental. For Klüger, memoirs become counter-monuments that preserve memory in their authenticity and accuracy.

Trauma of the Holocaust experience and time in the concentration camp can never be replicated and represented is the conviction of Klüger. Recalling her experience of visiting Dachau later with some friends, she writes:

It was a clean and proper place... Today a fresh wind blows across the central square where the infamous roll calls took place, and the simple barracks of stone and wood suggest a youth hostel more easily than a setting for tortured lives. The missing ingredients are the odor of fear emanating from human bodies, the concentrated aggression, the reduced minds... Sure, the signs and the documentaries and the films help us to understand. But the concentration camp as a memorial site? Landscape, seascape- there should be a word like *timescape* to indicate the nature of a place in time, that is, at a certain time, neither before nor after. (67)

Demanding a more authentic representation of memory, Klüger demands, “It won’t do to pretend that we can evoke the physical reality of the camps as they were when they functioned. Nevertheless, I want my timescapes. Evocations of places at a time that has passed.”(68). Spatially ordered images dominate Klüger’s mode of remembering and each place she had lived evokes a particular set of emotions and memories that shape her narrative. Klüger calls Vienna her prison and in her memoir, she depicts the literal and metaphorical entrapment the place symbolises in her memory and escape from their ongoing effects shapes the form and theme of her narrative.

From Vienna, Klüger was deported to Theresienstadt and it remained forever in her memory as a place that evoked feelings of “bitter euphoria.” In the most impressionable of years, Theresienstadt had a lasting impact on Klüger and her character. Her rejection of memorials and shared experience stem from the traumatic memory of being housed within the stifling Theresienstadt and extends to the continued sense of stasis. All her life one

perceives attempts to escape the memory of spatial suffocation by distancing herself from commitments; the double bind of memory continues as she tries to flee entrapment from stifling family bonds, to escape labels and their limitations.

Of Theresienstadt she writes, “looking back, I see Theresienstadt as broken chain of memories, lost friends, threads that split off the spindle” (74). Capturing her complex feeling for the place, Klüger says, “I loved Theresienstadt, for the nineteen or twenty months which I spent there made me into a social animal” and in the very next chapter she says, “and I hated Theresienstadt: it was a mudhole, a cesspool, a sty where you couldn’t stretch without touching someone. An ant heap under destructive feet” (87). Her deportation to Auschwitz and her time there were the most horrible for young Klüger and Auschwitz would forever remain a “lunatic terra incognita, the memory of which is like a bullet lodged in her soul where no surgery can reach it” (112).

Klüger’s first contact with Auschwitz was brutal as she was pushed and she fell out of the wagon hurting unto the ramp, into a world of harsh words, barking dogs, fetid water, air that smelled like nothing on earth and the soil that wanted her to disappear. Since the fall unto the ramp, *falling* has a staying power in Klüger’s life and narrative. “That ramp proved to have staying power, I have never stopped falling onto it...from the frying pan into the fire, from the cattle wagon onto the ramp, from the transport into the camp, from a closed place into the pestilent air. Falling” (95). Auschwitz had a crippling effect on Klüger’s child psyche as she realised that “the soil on which you stood wanted you to disappear” (95). On their first night at Birkenau, her mother’s suggestion that they walk into the electric wires was something she could never come to terms with all her life. There she witnessed the hierarchy of numbers, inhuman selections, extreme starvation, sadistic cruelty and dissolution of social structures.

The narration of Klüger’s revisiting Vienna forms a reconstruction through the description of place which is a melange of emotional recollection and memories of traumatic experience. Revisiting the visual repetition of trauma results in the returned immediacy of past experience and associations to the site of memory. Dialogues ensue between the narrative self and the experiencing self, overcoming the temporal and spatial boundaries. She adjusts and alters the significance of past entrapments in many ways. By reconstructing and recoloring her childhood memories she constructs space from multiple temporal viewpoints. Of this Astrid Erll comments, “communication via texts means that ‘the *immediate* situation of copresence is replaced by the “*expanded* context’. Texts are ‘speech acts’ in expanded contexts; they connect producers and receivers of a message across spatial and temporal borders.” (395) By reconstructing childhood experiences, reviving people and places through memory, Klüger gives a literary response to the danger posed by memorialisation to subjectivity.

By reconfiguring physical trauma of the past in order to achieve psychic escape in the present, Klüger’s spatialized reconstruction of memory not only emphasizes the significance of location but depicts experience both within and beyond space and time: she simultaneously locates her subjective memories in the contexts of specific places and times, while the immediacy of these experiences implicitly extends far beyond their spatial and temporal locations.

Klüger through her writing creates spaces through the filter of her subjective experience. Through her recollection and reconstruction of her traumatic memories, she



subtly offers a different view of space and time. Klüger spatializes memories without taking the time out of them. Though event, place and time are irretrievable, the narrative representation of trauma implicates the returned immediacy of past experiences, which it evokes and these narrative spaces do not succumb to the stasis of representation.

While Klüger expresses anxiety over personal experience threatened by public memorialisation or by narrative of film and documentaries, she substantiates her subjective memory by altering the importance of location within past spaces. Through her narrative, Klüger reconstructs memories with an emphasis on the recreation of literal topography, thus creating a spatialized account that places the tropes of entrapment and escape at the centre of the narrative. Klüger's attempt to self-liberation also opens new perspectives that serve to extend theories of trauma, space and memorialisation. When language and memory come together in life writing and memoirs, they produce space-times that are meaningful modes of remembering, multiplicity of trajectories, and thus potentiality of voice. Thus Klüger's writing has created a space for counter-monument as put forth by James Young, appealing to the conscience of the society and preserving the past in its authenticity, accuracy and timescapes of memory.

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## **Bodies at Risk: Reading Afflicted Subjectivities in Brian Fies's *Mom's Cancer* and Teva Harrison's *In Between Days***

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### *Abstract*

*The identity of an individual is obscured when the relationship of the body and the self is undermined by illness. The subversion of the self is crucial to our understanding of the relationship that is forged upon by the surroundings. Illness narratives have often undertaken the task of expressing this obfuscation rendered by the diseased-self. Brian Fies's *Mom's Cancer* (2006) and Teva Harrison's *In Between Days: A Memoir About Living With Cancer* (2016) are two such narratives which foreground the lived experiences of the illness and the unique challenges of manoeuvring their life post diagnosis. Drawing theoretical insights from Virginia Woolf, Susan Sontag, and Betty Rollin among others, this article seeks to investigate the kaleidoscopic character of the self that materialises during illness. In so doing, the article delineates the ways in which the narrators create visual metaphors through their graphic pathographies and enable us to experience the tumultuous journey emerging out of cancer.*

*Keywords: Graphic medicine, Cancer, Visual metaphor, Brian Fies, Harrison*

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### **Introduction**

“O Rose thou art sick.  
The invisible worm,  
That flies in the night,  
In the howling storm;  
Has found out thy bed  
Of crimson joy:  
And his dark secret love  
Does thy life destroy.”

(Blake 1794)

Blake's poem, ostensibly about the stealthy effects of jealousy, also apprehends the secrecy with which a mysterious fiend creeps itself into the vulnerable body. This can be equated to a longer period of time in which cancer, unknown to its host, has begun to engulf the core of the human body. According to the scholars of Blake, the worm's stealthy attack on the Rose has been imagined by the poet to envision “the invisible agents that cause human ailments” (Essick 121). Siddhartha Mukherjee's book about cancer is aptly titled *The Emperor of All Maladies*, which instantly brings to our mind the voracious nature of cancer in expanding its territory over the human body. The constant parallel of the cancer cells to

those of an Emperor is evident in each line. Mukherjee describes the exploits of the traveling cancer cells in the human body; the cells usurp the enemy genes and proliferate by means of “pathological mitosis” as a result, becoming “immortal” (Mukherjee 182). The disease destroys us with “secret love” by devouring the healthy tissue upon which it thrives.

The word ‘cancer’ has negative connotations, and literature provides ample evidence of this phenomenon. For instance, Anne Sexton, in her poem, “The Operation” describes her mother’s ovarian cancer as an “embryo / of evil” growing in her womb “as simply as she housed me once” (Sexton). In Margaret Atwood’s short story “Hairball,” the protagonist pictures the tumour inside of her to be a “flesh of her flesh” as “her warped child, taking its revenge” (Atwood 54). Cancer begins when a part of the body starts to grow out of control and “crowd normal cells” (American Cancer Society 2018). The “Father of Medicine,” Greek physician Hippocrates (460-370 BC), is usually credited having originated the term ‘cancer.’ The Greek terms *carcinos* and *carcinoma* were used by Hippocrates to describe non-ulcer forming and ulcer-forming tumours. It is however the Roman physician Celsus, who has translated the Greek terms into *cancer*, the Latin word for crab (Rothman 1999). The image of cancer as “the crab, grabbing hold, eating away, destroying from within” is crucial to our understanding of this fatal disease (Rothman 131). Cancer narratives delineate the protean identity of the individual during their encounter with the disease.

This paper takes into account two graphic narratives of cancer —Brian Fies’s *Mom’s Cancer* (2006) and Teva Harrison’s *In-Between Days: A Memoir About Living With Cancer* (2016)— to read the experiences of the cancer patients and their family. In so doing, the paper would look into the various aspects of the disease, and how it shapes the life of the people involved. *Mom’s Cancer*, originally a serialised online comic, is the story about a mother’s lung cancer, and the family’s struggle. The mother’s battle with cancer is a gripping tale, with humorous elements, told from the perspective of her eldest son, Brian. On the other hand, Harrison’s memoir is narrated from her perspective, of her emotional gauntlet, and her series of treatments. Like all cancer memoirs, they have everything on the page: the ugly, the good, the bad. As Jennifer Hayden observes “it is graphic, and in that sense, it can get more into the nitty gritty of a physical experience than just plain writing can” (Hayden). The two memoirs depict two sides of the impacts of this disease: the emotional effect that it has on the family, and on the individual patient. Yet, while very different in tone and style, *Mom’s Cancer* and *In-Between Days* equally explore their individual cancer stories in a deeply personal and heartfelt manner.

### **Afflicted Subjectivities: The Quandaries of Existence**

Living with cancer means living with the prospect of death. This in-betweenness of the intolerable present and the improbable future renders misery and uncertainty among those enduring the extreme experience of this illness. Susan Sontag’s essay on illness explains this dual existence of the patient, when she refers to illness as the “night-side of life, a more onerous citizenship. Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick” (Sontag 1). Life, with all its complexity, is reduced to a simple binary. Cancer patients’ travel into the other realm of existence traumatises them as they are severed from their former life and abruptly placed in an unknown world. This rooting out from their earlier life is evident in almost every cancer narrative. For instance in

*Mom's Cancer*, Fies illustrates this phenomenon through a series of panels where he portrays the agony of his mother when she is suddenly thrown into the other side. Right after her diagnosis, she is depicted as drowning in the sea of medical terminologies.

This disease makes the patients feel both intensely alone and also more intensely with others around them, as Virginia Woolf says “always to have sympathy, always to be accompanied, always to be understood would be intolerable” (Woolf 112). There is a paradox in the tumult of feelings that the patient undergoes. They want others to understand their pain, of what they are going through, but at the same time, the process of being accompanied and presumed to be understood renders a sense of falling apart. In the preface to her graphic memoir, Harrison starts with a sense of empathy for everyone “living with cancer or other serious illnesses” and emphasises the need for a narrative (Harrison 8). This bodily illness is invariably linked to the mental health of the patient, as is evident when Harrison starts seeing a psychiatrist to make sense of what is happening to her body. The first panel in the memoir justifies the title *In-between Days*, where the narrator places herself in the spaces “between people-between ideas- between one person’s understanding of any given word, and another’s” after her illness (9). The title itself speaks about the “liminal spaces” that a cancer patient occupies, spaces which “nobody claims” (10). Every chapter starts with a panel, illustrating her experiences before writing them down. This in turn, creates a visual image in the minds of the readers, and navigates them through the narrator’s mind. The images create a sense of empathy and the reader does not merely glance through the pages, but enters the mind of the narrator.

In their essay on the disease-subject, Andrea Kottow and Michael Kottow describe the role of the patients in reassessing their life. The patients are not mere observers of their body, instead, they are immersed in reevaluating values, relationships, priorities, and the overall perspective of life. It is evident that Fies’s mother decided to move to Southern California after her treatment, and Harrison worked to create awareness about cancer through various social media platforms. The perspective of life changes and this is due to the fact that they realise the futility of the rat-race in this short life. They devote their energy and time in doing something that would provide them happiness and a sense of fulfilment. The change in lifestyle comes with the change in perspective towards life. Many definitions changed for the narrator. For her, comfort no longer meant material comfort, instead she found comfort in a lot of things, “as in living with as little pain as possible”, or a cloth that she can wear all day at the hospital (Harrison 53). This changing notion about the body, about one-self, is reflective of the way cancer takes hold of one’s life.

The ‘new-normal’ post cancer engulfs everyone, as Havi Carel contemplates “the physical world is altered for the ill person” (Carel 14). This statement is crucial as it throws light on the various ways in which the person’s world and the perspective changes with their illness. Going to places would seem to be an Herculean task, with fears creeping out by the thoughts of unknown spaces. This fear is also evident in Susan Gubar’s memoir as she feels “disabled, deficient, unable to predict what will incapacitate me in a second and turn me into a shivering refugee among the healthy hordes” (Gubar). The impending sense of death invokes a certain kind of resilience and strength, but the quandaries of existence are deeply rooted into their lives, as they try to cope with the changes around them.

The changes are felt both in the personal and public spaces. Interaction with medical practitioners plays a significant role for them. Harvey Pekar and Joyce Brabner’s graphic

memoir *Our Cancer Year* (1995) expresses a sense of disillusionment in the process of treatment through their use of the shadowed and heavily cross-hatched ink work. Susan Gubar, in her memoir, cites an incident which reflects the growing indifference and money-minded medical institutes: “pointless to tell her we are sending her entire savings, thousands upon thousands of dollars, and the management would never consider letting such a gold mine go” (Gubar). This indifference is reiterated even in Fies’s description of his experiences with the doctors of the ‘Impressive University.’ In their engaging article on doctor-patient relationship, Venkatesan and Saji describes the process of the transformation of the patient into a “docile and silent subject”, when the “dynamics of power and discipline surpass care and sympathy in medical encounters” (Venkatesan & Saji). Fies constantly alludes to a small, diminished figure whenever he refers to his mother. One of the few colourful panels is the one describing the procedure that follows the treatment. It depicts his mom as a case divided into two parts: one for the doctors at the Impressive Hospital, and the other for a team of local oncologists. The irony of this panel is that the colour may deceive us into thinking that this is a positive event, but the last sentence “repeat until better or dead” makes us ponder about the imminent fear of death that lurks with cancer (Fies). The doctors’ casual replies to serious problems and their aggressive replies to a fairly non-serious problem induces feelings of futility and stupidity on the part of the narrator’s mother.

Similarly, Harrison also depicts the indifference on the part of the doctors who would ignore her pain, even if it “hurts so much” making a generic inquiry about her recent activities (Harrison 14). Going through her “new or differently” done activities, the doctors would surmise that “it sounds mechanical to me,” and never diagnose her. These “well-intentioned doctors” fail to recognise her cancer (Ibid.). In another instance, when Harrison was admitted to the emergency ward due to her unbearable pain, she faced a similar attitude by the doctor, who “didn’t send me for any tests. It seemed very clear to her that I had hurt myself mechanically. She gave me a prescription for codeine and sent me home to rest” (15). When she finds a huge lump in her breast, her family doctor shrugs off any probability of cancer, as her lump hurts. According to him, “cancer doesn’t hurt” and the lump seemed to be “an infected duct” (15). Eventually, after an ultrasound, this ‘lump’ turns out to be cancer. This constant trivialisation of the illness, when undiagnosed, leads to serious implications. The constant tussle with the medical authorities is evident in each of the illness narratives, especially cancer narratives. The cancer memoir offers “vigilant realism” as Barbara Ehrenreich calls it, in their dealing with the disease (Ehrenreich). They are not scared of the fatal truth of cancer, rather they strive to offer an antidote to the unreliable and terrifying statistics related to it. In doing so, they strip the masks of the one supposedly serving them.

Betty Rollin insightfully observes how, “disease may score a direct hit on only one member of a family, but shrapnel tears the flesh of the others” (129). This reflects the series of emotional pain that the afflicted subjects and their family undergoes. But the physical pain is equally excruciating. The ‘afterword’ by Fies’s mom, written a few months before her death, provides a glimpse of the pain in which she exclaims that her son “made me look a lot better than I felt” (Fies). The constant suffering can be experienced only by the one going through that phase of their lives. They realise that they have become an unwitting cause of suffering for the people they love. Even Harrison expresses this pain throughout her narrative. Her medicines which are supposed to lessen her pain have killed a part of her. In one of the panels, Harrison depicts the image of her eyes in different frames, and each eye is

positioned differently - towards the bottle of RX, towards the clocks, tablets, and the final frame depicts the pair of eyes staring into emptiness. Pain, suffering, and medications engross them at every second of their lives. Managing pain is tough and she spends some days “watching clocks and measuring pain” (Harrison 42). Hence, they trace a life where pain becomes an integral part of their subjectivity.

## Conclusion

The graphic novel allows us to see things from the writer’s perspective, even as they are blurred by time and sometimes deliberately lacking in detail. We share the incredulity and fear of the narrator in the graphic pathographies. The repeated, worried expressions on the faces of doctors and family members stare unblinkingly at the reader. The reader witnesses how the patient becomes a ghostly presence in their own life as the details of their face appear and recede throughout the book. These aspects and more make the form of the graphic novel an excellent choice to represent the inner turmoil of the individuals. Like any other medium for expression, the graphic novel acts as a therapy for the writers, as well as the readers. It serves as a kind of outlet for the patient describing their experiences, and also provides ample space for the doctors, as readers, to know their patients well. With evocative and powerful subjects like cancer, miscarriage, or infertility, the graphic novel has paved way for a whole new arena of empathy of the oft-silenced experiences. The visual portrayal of the experiences not only helps in the authorities’ understanding of the patient’s perspective, but shapes the popular understanding of medicine and illness as well. As Ian Williams concludes, graphic medicine enables “a complex layering of subjective and objective experiences, bridging the gap between clinical facts and personal perception” (William 65). The texts not only illustrate the personal impacts of cancer, but also induces the readers’ identification and empathy with the patients. Like most cancer narratives, these two texts have also highlighted and informed society’s notion of the illness. Hence, this article has discussed issues like alienation and isolation, the impact of illness on family and friends, and illness as a source of identity and self awareness.

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## **Disability as a Positive Identity: A Study of Shivani Gupta's *No Looking Back***

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### *Abstract*

*In an ableist society, people with disabilities face discrimination in almost every sphere of life. Women with disabilities suffer more and face multiple discriminations in the society due to stigma attached with disability. Through their life writings, women have come forward and challenged the negative notions that are attached to disability. The present paper attempts to study Shivani Gupta's memoir *No Looking Back* (2014) as it provides an authentic account of ableism that a disabled person has to face in everyday life. It also analyses the memoir through the social model of disability. While studying the memoir through social model of disability, views on this particular model and especially 'disabling barriers' as propounded by Tom Shakespeare's, a disability rights activist and theorist have been taken into consideration. The paper focuses on how the society aggravates Gupta's disability through the built environment. She faces environmental, structural and attitudinal barriers which contribute in turning her impairment into disability. Through her unlimited ability, Gupta proves that her disability is not inability. She breaks the various myths associated with disability and disseminates the message that disability is a positive identity thus, reversing the negative images that are associated with disability. The paper suggests that society should change their attitude towards people with disabilities and view it as a positive identity. It further suggests that society should aim at removing all the disabling barriers so that people with disabilities can fully participate in the mainstream society.*

*Keywords: Impairment, Disability, Barriers, Ability, Women, Attitude, Ableism, Positive Identity, Society.*

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The word 'memoir' is derived from the French 'memoire' meaning memory or reminiscence. A memoir is a subgenre of autobiography/biography that deals with a particular time in someone's life or a major event that occurred. It is usually about a specific theme. It is a story with a proper narrative structure, focus and subject matter, involving reflection on some particular events or places. In contemporary literature, memoir has become one of the most popular ways to describe and represent oneself. Thomas G.



Couser, a disability theorist in his book *Memoir: An Introduction* (2012) calls this phenomenon of increase in memoir writing as “memoir boom” and writes, “the memoir boom has at least coincided with, if not been impelled by, the rise of the disability memoir” (148). To counter the negative images that are attached to disability, people with disabilities have started writing about their experiences through memoirs. A substantial number of memoirs have been written by men with disabilities and now, women with disabilities also have started writing their memoirs. In India too, women with disabilities have started narrating their struggles with disability through memoir writing. By sharing their success stories through memoirs, the disabled women writers prove that their abilities are greater than their disabilities. Some of the memoirs by Indian disabled women writers that deserve mention are: Naseema Harzuk’s *Naseema: The Incredible Story* (2005), Malini Chib’s *One Little Finger* (2010), Preeti Monga’s *The Other Senses* (2012), Shivani Gupta’s *No Looking Back* (2014) and Reshma Valliappan’s *Fallen Standing: My Life as a Schizophrenist* (2015).

Women with disabilities have to face significantly more difficulties in an ableist society. They are often seen as dependent, helpless and become an object of pity in the eyes of non-disabled society as a result of various stereotypes existing in the society related to disabled women. Alison Sheldon, an expertise in the field of disability in her article titled as “Women and Disability” writes, “Disabled women are perceived to be needy, dependent and passive – stereotypical feminine qualities” (*Disabling Barriers, Enabling Environment* 71). To counter these negative stereotypes attached to them, women with disabilities have started writing about their experiences by claiming their disability identity as a positive one. Gupta’s memoir *No Looking Back* (2014) offers an insight into what it means to live with a disability in a country like India where disability is seen as a burden. Through her memoir, Gupta propagates that disability is socially constructed by voicing the discrimination that she faced in terms of physical, environmental and attitudinal barriers but she never gave up and hence, emerged as a strong woman by overcoming them through her positive self identity.

Born on 23 December, 1969, Shivani Gupta is India’s best known access consultants. She has spent her life in working towards improving the accessibility of public spaces like hospitals, hotel, educational institutions and other places. She is also the founder of AccessAbility and has taken many researches related to accessibility in India. She has also co-authored three publications related to improving accessibility for disabled people. Her main motto is ‘Access=Ability.’ She has received various awards for her great contribution in the disability sector.

Gupta’s disability was an acquired one. In the year 1992 at the age of twenty two, she met with a car accident. She got severely injured. She was hospitalised and diagnosed with a spinal injury and hence became disabled. Due to spinal injury, she lost senses below her shoulders. Seeing the seriousness of her injury, doctors recommended that she should be shifted to All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Delhi. She was a bold, smart and independent girl and her sudden accident and dependency on others was unbearable for her. Still, she did not lose hope and kept on motivating herself that everything would be fine soon. On the suggestions of Dr Air Marshal Chahal, a senior doctor specialized in spinal injury, Gupta was operated about one and a half month later after accident on 1 April, 1992. After her surgery, she got some movement in her hands. She could now move her hands and neck but could not walk and hence became wheelchair user.

While tracing her journey with disability, Gupta focuses on various environmental, structural and attitudinal barriers as propounded by social model of disability that she encountered and which contributed in turning her ‘impairment’ into ‘disability.’ The social model of disability sees disability as a societal construct, rather than as a medical impairment. In his essay “Disabling Barriers” Tom Shakespeare, a disability rights activist and theorist writes that the Social Model of disability is “the idea that people are disabled by society, rather than by their bodies” (*Disability: The Basics* 68). The model was developed in reaction to the medical model of disability that viewed disability as an individual deficit that needs to be cured, corrected or contained. The model makes the distinction between the words “impairment” and “disability.” About the distinction, Tom Shakespeare in his book *Disability Rights and Wrongs* (2006) writes:

The distinction between impairment and disability lies at the heart of the social model. . . Impairment is defined in individual and biological terms. Disability is defined as a social creation. Disability is what makes impairment a problem. For social modellers, social barriers and social oppression constitute disability, and this is the area where research, analysis, campaigning and change must occur. (34)

According to the social model, disability is a collective issue that is caused by the physical environment, structural, attitudinal, economic and political barriers. But most of the barriers can be reduced under one heading i.e. attitudinal barriers because how society views those with impairments is considered more important and change in the attitude of people can be helpful in the removal of these barriers.

Shivani Gupta faced the first environmental barrier when she returned to Delhi after the accident. She was unable to move to her residence which is situated at the second floor of the building due to inaccessible structure of the building for the wheelchair users. The architects had designed the building in such a way that only non-disabled people could access it. Tom Shakespeare in his book *Disability Studies: The Basics* (2018) writes, “Even when barriers derive from a physical building, transport system or technology, it has been the choice of some person to construct them in an enabling or disabling way, to offer supportive help or to neglect a disabled user” (68). As she could not move to second floor apartment due to inaccessibility of the building, she had to live with her grandparents at Faridabad. She painfully recalls another environmental barrier when once she visited the market to buy some stuff with her carer named Putul, she could not enter the shop as it had two steps which are inaccessible with her wheelchair. So, her carer went inside the shop and she had to wait outside the shop. So, lack of ramps at the shop contributed in turning her impairment to disability.

The author further encountered environmental barrier when once she along with her friend Annie and another colleague decided to watch a movie Titanic at Delhi’s first multiplex cinema theatre. When they reached, they were informed that wheelchair user could access only two of the four halls. When they went inside the hall, she felt disappointed as she had to sit separately in one of the corners of hall while her friends sat somewhere else. The accessibility of the hall was such that a person with a wheelchair could enter the hall and sit in a corner. She felt angry at such a discriminatory attitude towards disabled people. Her whole purpose of watching the movie with her friends failed due to inaccessible environment of the hall. She writes, “By the time the movie was over, I was shaking with anger for being singled out and treatment in this discriminatory manner” (93). She started screaming at the

manager and pointed at the poor service. According to Gupta, if the architects of the building have the right kind of attitude towards disabled people, they can design it in such a way, that every disabled person can access the building easily. But inaccessibility of the hall pointed out the negative attitude of the building management towards disabled and she was vocal about it. Tom Shakespeare in his book *Disability Studies: The Basics* (2018) writes:

Attitudes are central to the disability experience. When policymakers, architects, engineers and designers have the right attitudes, they are more likely to commission or construct accessible facilities. Within environments – hospitals and schools and workplaces and leisure facilities – non-disabled people can make people feel welcome and included when they have the right attitudes. Supportive attitudes make access easier – while negative attitudes create barriers in themselves. (76)

Whenever Gupta went outside, she continued to face attitudinal barriers. People made her feel miserable through their pitiful gaze towards her impaired condition. She was trying hard to be self reliant but pathetic attitude of people towards her impairment disabled her and she did not know how to change the attitude of people towards her. She writes, “Every time, I went out in Delhi, I was used to bystanders being curious about what has happened to me and feeling sorry for me and saying ‘Chhi chhi! See, such a young and pretty girl in wheelchair—who will marry her now?’ Such remarks made me feel sad for myself for a while” (76). Gupta further recalls that sometimes her friends did not want to take her along with them because of her disability. Once, her friends at the rehabilitation centre decided to go for a trip to Nainital. She too agreed to go on a trip but later she came to know that none of her friends actually wanted to take her to trip due to her disabled condition. They felt that they would not be able to enjoy the trip with their disabled friend. She was deeply hurt when she came to know of such discriminatory attitude towards her because of her disability. Whenever, she used to visit any office, she had to hear from the people that she should not have come personally as if her presence was a burden. She writes, “There were numerous instances wherein I was told off at offices—they said I should not have troubled myself to visit personally, I should have sent a representative. My physical presence to them seemed like a burden” (76).

The author encountered another attitudinal barrier when she had gone to Haridwar with her father to seek blessings. While she was in a queue to enter the temple at Haridwar, a middle aged woman came to her and handed her a fifty-five paisa coin. She was shocked and could not understand anything. She was confused but soon she realized that being disabled, the woman mistook her for a beggar. Gupta was hurt after such a disabling attitude on the part of woman who took pity on her and dropped the coin in her lap. Gupta is highly critical of such attitudinal barrier oftenly faced by disabled people in India. They are only seen as beggar, dependent and needy and reduced only to the objects of pity in the eyes of non-disabled people:

The only thing that distinguished me from everyone else there was my using a wheelchair. The woman had thought me a beggar simply because I was disabled! She had assumed that because I was disabled I was needy. With her one ‘charitable’ act, the woman had managed to make me question my own being. (63)

Gupta is highly critical of such charities given by people as well as government to people with disabilities. She focuses on the fact that such charities instead of helping them, make them feel more miserable and contribute to their oppression. Tom Shakespeare in his essay

titled as “The Social Model in Action” writes, “Disabled people are distinguished from non-disabled people. Disabled people are an oppressed group, and often non-disabled people and organisations—such as professionals and charities—are the causes or contributors to that oppression” (*Disability Studies Reader* 199).

Shivani Gupta faced the structural barrier when she tried to get job back in the hotel where she used to work before the accident. She was rejected there because of her disability. Tom Shakespeare in his book *Disability Studies: The Basics* (2018) writes, “People can face discrimination in getting a job if they have a disability, and keeping a job if they become disabled” (79). Later when she got a job at corporate house as a programme manager, she felt discriminated there also due to structural barriers. The building where her office was located had inaccessible entrance. There was an accessible entrance also but it was reserved for VIPs only. Even after repeated requests, she was not allowed to use it. Such attitude of the company towards the only disabled employee was disappointed and felt as if she were a second class citizen. Tom Shakespeare in his book *Disability Studies: The Basics* (2018) writes, “Aside from schools and hospitals, most public buildings are less indispensable to the good life, although barriers send the message that disabled people are second class citizens” (72). Due to continued discrimination, she resigned from the job after ten months because she realized that with such ill –treatment of the company towards its only disabled employee, she could not work there. She writes:

My experience was not unique. It was a typical example of the kind of discrimination disabled people face every day. The discrimination is often very subtle, and many a time it makes us feel that we are being unreasonable by asking for our rights. As in my case, companies are unable or unwilling to make any accommodations for retaining a disabled employee. . . My abilities were not appreciated; rather my disability was made an issue of. (173)

Starting life afresh after her disability was not at all easy for Gupta. Instead of focussing on her disability, she shifted her attention to the things that she could do. She did not want to fit herself into the society’s negative notion related to disability. She writes. “It was difficult to fit myself into the picture of a disabled person painted by society. I was determined to draw a line between my physical condition and my spirit which seemed so much stronger than my body” (54). In 1992, she decided to work in rehabilitation centre. She went to United Kingdom to attend two month training as a peer counsellor at the Duke of Cornwall Spinal Treatment Centre, Salisbury. Finally after returning from UK, she got a job at the Indian Spinal Injuries Centre, Delhi. As the number of patients continued to increase in rehabilitation, she started peer counselling to create awareness among people related to spinal injury.

The author also writes about her friendship with Vikas who joined as an occupational therapist in the rehabilitation centre where she used to work. She liked him because like others he never considered her disabled. Later, she married him. He even went with her to Bangkok to attend fifteen day training on ‘Non-Handicapping Environments for the Disabled and the Elderly’ organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN-ESCAP) in Bangkok, Thailand. The program made her realize that non-handicapped environment as the basic right for every disabled person where he or she would be able to access all the places with ease and dignity as non – disabled person.

In 2004, Gupta received the Neerja Bhanot award. In the same year, she also received the National Role Model Award presented annually by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. Further in the same year, she went to UK to pursue post graduate program in University of Reading to specialize in “accessibility” a course about creating inclusive environment for the disabled. Finally, Gupta along with Vikas and their friend Sunil formed an organisation called AccessAbility. They mainly focussed on promoting inclusive environment. Further, they stressed on fight against charity and unprofessionalism in disability area. Slowly, AccessAbility became known throughout India. Gupta also received the Ability Award and NCEPDP Shell Hellen Keller Award, the two most significant awards in disability sector. Through narrating her journey with disability, Gupta challenges the world of normality by affirming her disability as positive identity which is often viewed as negative and thus serves as a source motivation and inspiration to all the disability community. John Swain and Sally French, the disability theorists in their article titled as “Towards an Affirmative Model of Disability” published in the year 2000 have suggested a new conception of disability, which they term as an affirmation model where disabled people are affirming their disability identity as positive one and thus countering the dominant views on disability. They write:

In affirming a positive identity of being impaired, disabled people are actively repudiating the dominant value of normality. The changes for individuals are not just a transforming of consciousness as to the meaning of ‘disability’, but an assertion of the value and validity of life as a person with an impairment. (578)

Through the memoir, Gupta reaffirms her disability identity as she sees it as a positive one. She was determined to prove to the world her ability has nothing to do with her disability. Vikas, her friend, lover and husband was a great support and it was he who always motivated her and appreciated her abilities. She not only fought for her rights but of the whole disabled community through AccessAbility. After few months of marriage, her husband Vikas died in a tragic car accident. She too got injured in the accident and thus became disabled for the second time. The death of her husband who always supported her was unbearable for her. But she tried to come out of it. She decided to immortalise her husband by writing this memoir. She further resumed her work in AccessAbility. Still, she is active in this area.

## **Conclusion**

Shivani Gupta became disabled due to a car accident but she never let her disability overpower her abilities. She was determined to show to the world that her abilities were greater than her disability. Through her personal journey in the memoir, she communicates to the society that disability is positive identity. Further by affirming her disability identity, she proves that disabled people can live fulfilled and satisfying lives. Her personal journey and achievements proves that disability is just a part of her identity and not the whole identity. Her memoir breaks all those stereotypes attached to disabled people as needy, dependent and passive. Further she suggests that society needs to change its views towards disabled people and should not see disability in terms of charity that lowers their self esteem and confidence. She further suggests that instead of discriminating disabled people, society should focus on creating non-handicapped environment. She is critical of the barriers that she faced in the society and stresses the need to create enabling environment for the disabled

people so they can fully participate in the mainstream society and make valuable contributions to the society through their abilities.

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## Mary Kom Redefining the Culture of Peace through Manipur's 'Visibility'

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### *Abstract*

*The aim of this paper is to make a close textual study of the autobiography Unbreakable by Mary Kom in the light of peace studies. India's acclaimed female boxer Mary Kom, a native of Manipur (a sensitive north-eastern state of India that has always been on the edge like Kashmir) is the only female to become World Amateur Boxing Champion for record six times, the only female boxer to have won a medal in each one of the first seven World Championships, and the only boxer to win eight World Championship medals. She has also been given a political position by the Government of India. Through a critical reading of her life-writing I wish to argue that violence is not only tangible but also intangible that is prevalent in form of 'invisibility.' Invisibility in terms of Manipur means failure to fully appreciate and validate the presence of human beings in that state who remain ignored or unnoticed, except in the most limited and exploitative ways. My intent is to study Manipur through the life of Mary Kom and propose how making a name through sports can make a state/community visible. And this 'visibility' is essential to maintain peace in the face of violence in our existing world.*

*Keywords: Autobiography, Mary Kom, Manipur, Peace Studies, Visibility.*

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India's Northeast has been a bitter conundrum of earliest and contemporary insurgency in the country. The violence in the Naga Hills began with independentist demands since 1952, followed by Mizo rebellion in 1966 and the recent conflicts of 1970s. Indian pugilist, Mary Kom's statement in her autobiography *Unbreakable* focusses the attention on the violence in Manipur, she mentions that "Manipur has been an insurgency-torn state since the 1980s. ..., it is home to over thirty militant groups...., most notably NSCN-IM, NSCN-K, UNLF and KNO" (Kom and Serto 52). She wished to give up boxing in 2007 as her father-in-law was found dead after he was kidnapped by the insurgents. Interestingly, the Northeast India's connectivity with India through border is just four percent and it shares its borders with Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Tibet. Hence, the issue of border disputes and divided loyalties of people has pitted one community against the other.

The traditional disciplines of social sciences explore violence and building of peace from the lens of economics, law, sociology, history, political science, and psychology. Literature with its genre of life-writing gives us a point of departure and provide an interdisciplinary approach to peace studies. This paper approaches Manipur through the life-writing of Mary Kom. Manipur has earned recognition over the years through its sporting

culture. There are many names of the sportspersons from Manipur who won laurels, but Mary Kom was the first Manipuri to win a medal in the Olympics and to have an autobiography to her account. Though the empirical studies inform us about the direct violence in Manipur, but literature will help us to throw light into structural violence and working through of 'symbolic peace' through the life-writing of this sportswoman. Ideally peace seems to be balanced upon the systems and institutions. But liberalism bases the concept of peace on participation, agency, individualism, freedom, and social right. Peace Studies in this light shifts its perspective from system or institutions to varied aspects of social phenomenon.

The volatility in Manipur is curbed by government initiatives of having peace talks with the insurgents, and the peace processes at the local community level also negotiate peace on an everyday basis. Ironically, the violence and instability are also caused by the government's own apparatuses. Thus Northeast, and especially Manipur can be seen as a violent and unstable state with the State apparatuses against its citizens. This factor disturbing the peace of life in Manipur is locally termed as '*khutlai-paiba lalhouba*' meaning an armed rebellion.

Besides the geographical or political demands and the hard life, the people of Northeast also face racial discrimination and viciousness of the people from other states of India because of their different facial features. They are either insulted, molested, beaten, treated as second-class citizens, or snubbed as 'Chinkies' and 'Momos' for their looks. The film *Axone* (2019) directed by Nicholas Kharkongor is an evidential proof of the structural violence (social injustice) faced by the people of Manipur in North India. The violence as witnessed in the real time scenario is very much related to the non-agency or 'invisibility' of the people from the Northeast or people of Manipur in this case. I argue that through the increasing participation of the people of Manipur, especially women in sports and their winning laurels is becoming a reason of initiating positive peace in the state in face of structural violence that exists there. Recently, the 2021 Olympics silver medal in weightlifting was clinched by Mirabai Chanu from Manipur. Johan Galtung's 'positive peace' is "a condition in which there is relatively robust justice, equity, and liberty, and relatively little violence and misery at the social level" (Webel and Galtung 11). Its prerequisites are factors like education, health, sports, food security, income security, gender equality, personal transformation etc.

Direct violence is perpetrated by both militancy and military. But the work on social structure and culture will lead to an absence of structural violence. Taking the Galtung's theory of violence ahead "Structural violence is the harm done by socio-political structures and decisions that deprive someone of their access to basic needs necessary for fulfilling one's full potentials in life" (Webel and Galtung 151). Thus, all forms of discrimination and prejudice are part of structural violence. Thus, to ignore a person, to devalue their existence, to unmark their representation is also a form of violence that inhibits peace. In this regard, Shapiro too asserts that "Such invisibility perpetrates a type of violence against them—a quiet, symbolic form of violence, but an assault on their being no less than more overt and physical forms of violence" (105).

Sports these days is an essential aspect for the development and peace with its important characteristic of 'social connectivity.' It includes both horizontal (players, teams, coaches, volunteers, and spectators at the community level) and vertical (national



governments, sport federations, and international organizations) link of relationships. The visibility that I refer to is precisely based on participation, inclusion of diversity, winning laurels, personal transformation, and networks. According to a report by Right to Play, the community sport networks if inclusive, “are an important source of social networking, helping to combat exclusion and fostering community capacity to work collectively to realize opportunities and address challenges ... sport’s connecting dimension can help to unify people from diverse backgrounds and perspectives, establishing a shared bond that contributes positively to social cohesion. For this reason, sport has long been used as a means to promote national unity and harmony within and across nations.” (5-6).

Mary Kom belongs to the ethnic Kom tribe of Manipur. On 24<sup>th</sup> November 1982 she was born to peasant parents in a village called Sagang in Manipur’s Churachandpur district. She is the eldest among her two siblings. Her father was strict, but she wanted to pursue her dream of learning boxing since childhood. Mary has won many prestigious honours including winning Asian Women Championship five times, *Padma Shri* in 2006 and *Padma Bhushan* in 2013. She has also been revered by titles the ‘Magnificent Mary’ and ‘*Meethoileima*’ (exceptional lady) and is an elected member of the Indian Parliament (2016); which is an important feat that marks her and her state’s visibility in the Indian sub-continent. Her fame arose with 2012 Olympics bronze medal (the first time that women’s boxing was part of the Olympic Games), Commonwealth, and National Championships.

Film director Omung Kumar also dedicated a biopic to Mary Kom (2014) starring Priyanka Chopra that catapulted her to greater national fame. Her victories in the ring led to her socio-economic mobility and personal transformation. She claimed her space and made representation through the boxing ring that fostered an “erosion of difference” as it highlighted the earlier discounted image of strong women in a man’s field (Heywood and Dworkin 117). Thus, Mary’s autobiography is not about Manipur’s insurgency alone, but it investigates a wide range of social phenomena, including individual responsibility, economy and gender aspect, and intercultural relations. Her life narrative testifies that, ““(P)ease does not only imply a situation where there is no war but it symbolizes nourishment for one’s soul and that of others ... it is not just absence of war and tension, and it encompasses the existence of freedom of expression and interpersonal harmony that fosters social justice”” (qtd. in Marshall 11).

For the people of Northeast, the urge is to get recognized as a part of whole humanity. Mary writes in her autobiography that after winning silver in World Women’s Boxing Championship in Pennsylvania, USA in 2001, “My community was proud that I was now an international-level boxer. It was the first sporting achievement of its kind by anyone in our small tribe. To be honest, one of the greatest motivating forces for me has been my desire to assert the identity of my tribe ‘Kom’ within my own country and the world over. We are just a few thousand people. I hoped that by coming up in sports and getting known worldwide, I’d be able to popularize the culture and ethos of my tiny tribe” (Kom and Serto 30). Her feats have led to the social inclusion of her community and herself on the international level. It can be ascertained that the structural violence relies on the need of identity, reputation, and security, which are essential for maintaining positive peace.

Mary poignantly mentions that she used her prize money to buy a paddy field for her *Apa* (Father) so that he was no more a landless farmer. She also supported her younger brother and sister in education. She says, “The cheque might have been for me, in

acknowledgement of my achievements, but my boxing career wasn't just about me, it was about my whole family. We were in it together in every way. And where would I be without the Manipur boxing establishment?" (Kom and Serto 30). She owes her excellence to the soil of Manipuri community and her adversity.

Shapiro remarks that "any society concerned with its emotional health and the expectations of a worthwhile future must ensure that its young, in particular, are socialized into a culture of authentic meaning and purposefulness" (130-131). The 'working through' of emotional and mental peace along with holistic development of an individual while focussing on the goal/purpose is the vital element in any sports. After her class six Mary thought to pursue a rigorous career in sports, "I would pursue a career in sports and get a job under the sports quota, and then I would help my parents, so they'd no longer be poor" (Kom and Serto 17). Her second World Championship gold medal led to her posting as a sub-inspector in 2005 by the Government of India. After winning silver at World Women's Boxing Championship, she said that she "was proud to be Manipuri and to represent Manipur" (Kom and Serto 65). The visibility of identity is marked not only through consciousness but positive efforts in the light of representation in addition to becoming a cultural icon that we observe through the life-history of Mary Kom.

In 1999, she went to Sports Authority of India (SAI) Imphal to get a seat and pursue the sport of her dreams. Dingko Singh, a Manipuri who had won gold in 1998 Bangkok Asian Games was her icon, she "secretly wished to be like him" (Kom and Serto 19). She learnt boxing from Oja Ibomcha, who was recognized for his contribution to the field with Dronacharya Award in 2010 by the Government of India. Mary writes that Indian Amateur Boxing Federation (IABF) with the permission from AIBA, the governing body of the sport introduced women's boxing in 1998; but in Manipur, coaches had been enrolling and training women enthusiastically since 1996. She proudly mentions that she along with other female boxers like Sarita, Sandhyarani, Mandakini Chanu, and Sarjubala Devi; "stepped into the world of boxing under the guidance of the state's coaches" (Kom and Serto 22). The Manipur Boxing Association (MBA) under the guidance of Khoibi Salam had introduced the sport before any other state in the country, which truly is admirable looking at the sensitive condition of the state.

Finally, the *Khel Ratna* paved the way for many things for Mary as the corporate world started to come forward to sponsor individual sports. Kenneth Boulding finds that factors like habits of acceptance of peace, increasing the travel and mutual communication opportunities of individuals within the system, economic interdependence, mutually coherent perceptions that exclude the use of force, and creating taboos to prevent the use of violence are important to propagate 'stable/sustainable peace' (62-66). Mary states that she was not always recognized as Indian in her own country. She was always against any kind of discrimination. She also mentions in her autobiography, "Because of our oriental looks, people from the Northeast are often mocked in other parts of India. In a country where people speak all kinds of languages and have varied kinds of looks, why is such treatment meted out to us? When I used to say that I am from Manipur, many people didn't even know where it was. To be honest, in Manipur too we refer to people from mainland India as 'Mayangs,' or non-Manipuri, and that too makes me sad" (Kom and Serto 61).

She also states whether she looks ‘Indian’ or not, but she is Indian and will represent India through her sport of boxing, with pride and all her heart. She also believed that sports have always been a uniting force, in India and around the world. It has helped her to appreciate both the culture of her own country and the world. She stoically writes, “I am proud when media persons from across the world come to Kangathei to trace the story of women’s boxing. I feel I have played a big part in making that happen” (Kom and Serto 61).

The faith in her own ability to develop and transform, and her belief reigns throughout Mary’s narration of the 2012 Olympics and other victories in the style of a Biblical allusion. Her grit and passion were very much based on her identity and its crisis and she describes her feats as “I was the David who took on the Goliaths in the boxing ring – and I won, most of the time” (Kom and Serto 4). Just like the infinitesimal David, Mary Kom has valiantly fought the allegorical Goliaths both inside and outside the ring. After winning Olympics she recalls that day was “the happiest day of my life, as I have returned to Ima [mother] Manipur after bagging a medal at the London Olympics and that has always been my dream” (Kom and Serto 79). Calling her land her mother is another factor of instilling faith and peace around with her efforts.

Mary regards that her favourite photo shoot was with the caption, “‘Our Kommitment to the Nation’” on the billboards in every nook and corner of Imphal and elsewhere in the Northeast (Kom and Serto 80). The advertisement with the coinage of the portmanteau word ‘Kom-mitment’ projected both the Kom tribe through Mary Kom and her own commitment to her grit for sports. Her autobiography also mentions how she thinks that her sport of boxing can advance to self-defence courses to tackle the violent crimes against women in India; for which she herself would like to train girls in and outside Manipur. She also mentions in the beginning of her autobiography, “the hardships I faced in my formative years are the foundation of my strength. I am tough because of my background. They made me who I am today” (Kom and Serto 5). The life story of Mary is like the legend of a warrior woman, a *virangana* prototype describing “a good queen ... [who] leads her people ... usually dressed as a male, is seen to operate within the widest sphere of morality ... *virangana* ideal commends physical training and active deployment of the body in combat” (Thomas 52). Her autobiography if studied critically and closely is not just her life-writing but is quite epical in its scale equivalent to the hero/heroine who undergoes a series of adventures that test his/her valour, intellect, and character and participates to form the cultural history, fight for identity, and bring about peace on his/her nation or a tribe. She is indeed the ‘Queen of Boxing’ for many (Kom and Serto 51).

She gives an account of her rigorous training “I had to run ten rounds of the athletic track, at medium speed to begin with. As my speed increased, I had to run twelve rounds daily, which took me twenty-five minutes to complete. I would cool down and then do stretching exercises ... I would rest through the day and get ready for the sparring sessions in the evening. I was keen on practicing feint attack techniques, but my coach wanted me to strengthen my body, particularly my belly. I also did circuit training, which is very tiring” (Kom and Serto 72). It takes a lot of determination, grit, pain, and sacrifice to make oneself visible on the field; at times cooling down and at times fighting it out as per situation. The instances of the life of any sportsperson showcase their strength and capacity and consistently inspire people and their communities in a way that promote hope and provide a

positive outlook for the future which are essential ingredients to the endurance of all development and peace endeavours.

Mary Kom established Boxing Academy in 2006 to give back to sport and society. She wanted that the women of her country can relate to her and find inspiration and hope through her work. She even fought against the stereotypical representation of not only Manipuri's but women too per se, she remarks, "In our society, the woman runs the house, even if she is a career woman ... In our case, Onler [her husband] runs the house and fulfils social obligations" (Kom and Serto 37-38) (emphasis added). She proudly states that her unusual marriage and supportive husband who looked after the house and the children was the reason behind her medals after marriage and motherhood. In this regard sports led to her negotiation with her socio-economic space as a woman too but provided her freedom of expression to subvert the strangling ideology of the society.

Mary Kom's life narrative is full of inner, personal, and extra-personal struggle which revolves around her Olympic quest, motherhood, and the problem of insurgency in Manipur. She brought peace and happiness to her home, community, and the nation by venturing into the male domain of boxing. Hence, in Coleman's words Mary has successfully affected 'sustainable peace' (society-wide network of relationships and mechanisms that promote justice and address the root causes of enmity) on all the three levels: micro-level (individual), meso-level (social community), and macro-level (national/international).

Conflict/Tension is the key to the door of peace as we witness through the story of this sportswoman. It's evident how Mary as a native of Manipur understood the problem and responded to the need of development and the accomplishment of peace within her own home and even outside through self-engagement, engagement with others, and making the self as well as Manipur 'visible' through collective efforts of many like her from the field of sports. The paper has looked into the 'structural problems' that impede equal rights for people with different characteristics and serves as an illustration of multidimensional conflict work for peace and development from the domain of sports.

Narratives/personal histories of sports icons like Mary Kom help one in pursuing common goals, disputing stereotypes, respecting work to meet family/community needs, and working for mutual well-being with the help of positive self-concepts and appreciation for the difference. Sports in terms of high-performance sportspersons and winners at international level enable people like Mary Kom to serve as powerful peace ambassadors, spokesperson and role-models for development and peace initiatives through their visibility and inclusion at the global level. To conclude, I observe the workability of peace and development is essentially based on 'visibility.' This visibility can be worked through on the basis of 'certain aspects' which would propagate the same in any given condition- Audacity of Hope (making something happen against all odds), *Ubuntu* (interconnected life as belonging to a greater whole without stereotypes), and *Tikkun Olam* (repairing of the world through meaningful engagement in bettering lives). These three aspects are specimen of sustainable peace through sports and development and hence are avidly projected in the autobiography of Mary Kom '*Unbreakable.*'

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**Totalitarianism and Individual Liberty: A Study of Contemporary Literary Texts by Jung Chang, Julia Alvarez, Svetlana Alexievich and Shirin Ebadi**

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*Abstract*

*A totalitarian regime is known to create illusions of progress, new social structures and ideologies while committing atrocities on its own subjects, robbing them of their fundamental liberties and basic dignity. The paper aims at an exploration of four texts by women authors; Jung Chang's Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China, Julia Alvarez's In the Time of the Butterflies, Svetlana Alexievich's Secondhand Time: The Last of the Soviets, and Shirin Ebadi's Until We are Free: My Fight for Human Rights in Iran. It seeks to analyse how the banality of evil, which the political philosopher, Hannah Arendt described as a characteristic of despotic regimes, continues to persist in tyrannical regimes of China, Dominican Republic, Russia, and theocratic Iran. The objective of the analysis is to elucidate how, by deploying the diverse genres of a family history, a historical fiction, an oral history, and a memoir, the four writers provide a reflection on the ambiguity of evil and the ensuing individual as well as collective trauma of the people. It attempts, through a textual analysis, to shed light on the modus operandi of despotic regimes and highlights ways in which they succeed in establishing and exercising a tremendous power in subjugating millions for extended periods of time.*

*Keywords: Totalitarianism; human rights; political power; social conformity; oppression*

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**Introduction**

A panoramic view of the last hundred years of world history reveals to an objective mind that the political scientist Francis Fukuyama might not have been altogether justified in proclaiming that with the invention of liberal democracy humanity had reached its end-point of social evolution (Fukuyama 1989). As much as over-optimism, such a view tends to have a strong bias towards a western democratic political model whose roots are deep in colonialism and slavery. The basic issue with such a view that announces the end of a period in human history is that it fails to observe that the evolution of social and political orders is less predictable than what meets the eye. Historical movements do not have an underlying, predictable logic but rather are shaped through an interaction with individual choices and how those choices are worked out within a social and political network. This is how we get

an insight into the complex nature of power and its manifestations in different countries of the world.

Days before the collapse of the Berlin wall, Fukuyama in an exuberant, ground-breaking article, “The End of History?” heralded the triumph of liberal democracy and capitalism (Fukuyama 4). Applying Hegelian dialectics, he argued that, with the death of communism and fascism, reason and freedom had finally been grasped. Fukuyama essentially argued that there remained no ideological competitor to liberalism. What Fukuyama fails to realize is that liberalism is a product of a certain historical condition made possible through imperialism among other things. When Fukuyama developed this political treatise, supposedly some sixty percent of the countries across the world were functioning as democracies (Fukuyama 1992, 16). However, an appraisal of the recent state of world affairs, suggests that Fukuyama’s exalted hope of liberal-democratic utopias has been rather short lived. The recent report of Freedom House, an independent watchdog organization, reveals that only 40% of the world’s population today lives in democracies (Csaky, 2021), indicating clearly a decisive, anti-democratic turn across nations of the world. This astounding revelation points out to the disturbing fact that autocratic regimes are again gaining ascendancy. The report states that incumbent leaders from Central Europe to Central Asia are increasingly resorting to corrupt, opportunistic and anti-democratic practices often cloaked in the ideological agenda of ruling parties, which have global implications for the cause of human freedom (Csaky, 2021).

Against this background of growing concern over the shrinking space for democracy, the paper explores four contemporary texts by women writers; Jung Chang’s *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China* (1991), Julia Alvarez’s *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994), Svetlana Alexievich’s *Secondhand Time: The Last of the Soviets* (2013), and Shirin Ebadi’s *Until We are Free: My Fight for Human Rights in Iran* (2016) to understand, how totalitarian regimes with their despotic machinery, perpetuate what Hannah Arendt refers to as the banality of evil (Berkowitz 2013). The texts provide a critical view of the autocratic regimes of Joseph Stalin who ruled USSR, 1922-1952; Rafael Trujillo, who governed the Dominican Republic, 1930 to 1961; and Mao Zedong, who administered China from 1949 to 1976, and the theocratic regime of twenty first century Iran. Deploying diverse genres-- of a family saga, a historical fiction, an oral testimony, and a memoir-- these women authors ponder over, how evil was visited upon their countries, during the reign of these totalitarian rulers.

## **The Origins of Totalitarianism**

Hannah Arendt in her book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) analyses totalitarianism as a system engendered by modernity. She defines it as a system that demands absolute, unconditional, and unflinching loyalty of the individual members to a certain ideology at the cost of all other social commitments, be it to one’s family, friends or comrades. Arendt cites the examples of Nazism, where individuals were exhorted to submit to the “natural law” that declared some races as superior to others. In the case of Soviet Union, they were asked to subscribe to the “historical law”, which asserted that certain classes must die out (Danoff 212). To enforce the ideology, layers of bureaucratic machinery come into existence, replacing governments of the earlier era. Evil takes an impersonal turn

as the bureaucratic officials enforce the state agenda, in the process destroying, what Arendt considers to be the political essence of the human condition (Arendt 459).

Studying the historical development of totalitarianism in the modern era, one could trace it to the period between the two World Wars, a period that saw the rise of fascist leaders, in Italy and Nazi Germany of Western Europe. Likewise, after the 1917 Bolshevik revolution, autocratic communist regimes rose to power, first in Soviet Russia and later in People's Republic of China, besides the caudillos, i.e., despots who seized power in the South American and the Caribbean Republics, as well as the many tyrannical regimes in Asia and Africa, which succeeded to power in the postcolonial period after the decline of imperialism.

Reflecting on the model of American democracy, a century ago, the 19<sup>th</sup> century French diplomat, Alexis de Tocqueville had cautioned that, should despotism find root in a democracy, it would have a more devastating impact than any Roman emperor or tyrant of the past (Kaplan 2005). Tocqueville had reasoned that humans everywhere are alike; they are driven by self-interest and trivial pleasures, with minimal concern for fellow human beings. Later, the Marxists would argue that men can overcome their animal state only through constructive labor, and basic community life, i.e., by following social laws (Engels 130). For this a powerful state is essential, which can wield immense protective power and keep social behaviour of the citizens regulated. With great prescience, Tocqueville predicted the emergence of a potentially autocratic regime in the guise of a democracy. Such a regime would arrogate to itself the power to monitor its subjects as with children, without breaking their wills, but rather by guiding them, like a shepherd tending to his timid flock (Kaplan 2005).

From the texts under discussion here, it is apparent that the worst fears of Tocqueville have come true. As the human rights activist and the Nobel Peace prize awardee, Shirin Ebadi in her book, *Until We are Free*, ominously asks: "What should a society do, when a leader elected through a democratic process seeks to subvert the very legal foundation on which the state, constitution, and electorate that voted him into power is based on?" (Ebadi 9).

## **The Personality Cult**

In his dystopian novel, *1984*, George Orwell dwells extensively on how dictators build a personality cult by creating a credible ideology with which to cultivate and maintain their power over the masses. In their works, both Svetlana Alexievich and Jung Chang, speak of how, both Stalin and Mao deploy the 'Big Brother' tactic of propaganda to adroitly brainwash their populace into submitting to autocracy without raising questions. This is affected through, what the Frankfurt School philosophers, Adorno and Horkheimer, in their book, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), explain as the blunting of critical consciousness of the citizens.

Identifying, the fascist ruler, as 'a new anthropological type', (Adorno et al. 712), in his 1950 book, *The Authoritarian Personality*, Adorno attempts to trace the evolution of authoritarian consciousness through various epochs of history. He highlights nine personality traits common to these despots, ranking them on an 'F' scale ('F', meaning fascist). Adorno opines that these twentieth century authoritarian personalities harboured a basic belief that



common people have a propensity to be spiteful and are hence antisocial by nature. These fascist leaders express doubt on the social outcome if these masses are allowed to pursue their self-interest (Feldman 45). They believed in close regulation of these masses, to ensure they behave appropriately in social settings (Adorno et al. 720). Moreover, they have no difficulty in converting the unsuspecting subjects to their ideology to gain their political allegiance. Mussolini in Italy and Hitler in Germany had won over even those with democratic sensibilities, to build fascism, into a strong and respectable movement (Harris 805).

Svetlana Alexievich and Jung Chang, reflect on how the totalitarian communist regimes, in Russia and China, effectively used propaganda, to ideologically brainwash their unsuspecting subjects, and erect an entire edifice of illusion, a make-believe of the supreme power of the state. In *Secondhand Time*, Svetlana recounts how people were constantly fed on falsehood and were psychologically conditioned by successive regimes. One of her interviewees, Anna Ilinichna confesses:

Our faith was sincere...naive...We thought that any minute now...there were buses idling outside, waiting to take us away to democracy. We'd finally leave behind these run-down Khrushchyovkas and move into beautiful houses, build autobahns to replace these broken-down roads, and we'd all turn into respectable people. No one searched for rational proof that any of this would really happen. [...], we voted with our hearts, as well [...]. Pure euphoria! (Alexievich 64)

In her book, *Wild Swans*, Jung Chang's mother reflects on how, the entire nation including school children and peasants were lead into believing Mao's campaign, 'The Great Leap Forward' while being enlisted for the grandiose project of producing steel. Mao, like Stalin, was the subject of pervasive personality cult. Huge posters of the leader, looming over a sea of human faces decorated every street square. Jung Chang reflects on how Mao cultivated an enigmatic persona:

Mao made himself more godlike by shrouding himself in mystery. He always appeared remote, beyond human approach. [...]. Few people, except his court staff, ever had any contact with him. Even his colleagues at the very top only met him in a sort of formal audience [...] Fear was never absent in the building up of Mao's cult (Chang 347- 348).

## **The Banality of Evil**

Hannah Arendt recalls how, after World War I, against a background of aggressive nationalism and divisive forces, the democratic bias of hitherto egalitarian societies began to slowly erode. It was a time, when Nazi chauvinism, with utter disregard of the unique talents and personalities of its individual subjects, set about fostering social prejudices. Arendt warns us that recognizing evil may not always be easy (Arendt *Eichmann* 1963). Alluding to the layers of the Nazi cadre and the bureaucratic structures that administered the pogrom, Arendt explains how evil can often take an impersonal turn. Covering Eichmann's trial, Arendt was struck with disbelief, as she beheld the Nazi General, he was "terribly and terrifyingly normal" (Berkowitz 2013). She found nothing diabolical about him and he could be mistaken for the man next door. It is this banal face of evil that Arendt fears most about totalitarianism.

The despot, much like Hitler in Germany, fosters a belief in the common public that, it is in the interest of the nation that he wishes to safeguard society from oddballs and deviants, who like the Jews, are often constructed as the nation's other. These despots engage in cultural nationalism and the majority versus minority power politics. In her book, Alvarez reflects on how the despot, Trujillo, polarised the Dominican society by openly discriminating against the Haitian immigrants and the Dominican citizens of African descent.

Chronicling her suffering, under the misogynistic Teheran regime, Ebadi in her memoir *Until We Are Free*, explains how she was compelled to comply with a hypocritical interpretation of Islam that denied women a role in Iranian society. Her voice of dissent was not taken kindly, and she was accused of being sold out to the west, and subjected to continuous hate mail:

If you go on as you are now, we will be forced to end your life. [...], stop slandering the Islamic Republic. [...]. Killing you is the easiest thing we could do (Ebadi 8).

It is of paramount importance to these despots, that people conform to the rules. The regime feels justified in exercising threats, sanctions or punishments, to prevent people from disobeying the regime. In her book, *Wild Swans*, Jung Chang writes:

... if you offended Mao you would fall into disgrace. They also knew that you could not speak your mind and resign, or even resign quietly: resignation was seen as an unacceptable protest (Chang 304).

### **The Despots' Modus Operandi**

Initially, not every totalitarian regime is perceived as evil. Often, the regime succeeds in attaining power by selling its subjects the *telos* myth, i.e., by promising the subjects of something better to come. This utopian vision promises them the realization of a better life, an escape from suffering and degradation; but soon though, contradictions become apparent. In, *In the Time of the Butterflies*, Alvarez laments how the gains of economic prosperity Trujillo had garnered for the Dominican Republic were offset by a shocking disregard to human rights. Freedom of speech, thought, and action is hindered.

Suddenly, the dark fills with spies who are paid to hear things and report them down at Security. *Don Enrique claims Trujillo needs help in running this country...* Words repeated, distorted, words recreated by those who might bear them a grudge, words stitched to words until they are the winding sheet the family will be buried in when their bodies are found dumped in a ditch, their tongues cut off for speaking too much (Alvarez 10).

The state devises every way possible to keep people submissive and generally docile. Reminding citizens of their duty to obey the State enforces social conformity, and soon the instinct to obey gradually becomes internalized (Kelman and Lee 1989). Children from an early age are trained to become obedient. Jung Chang recounts her own mother's childhood days and how she and the other kids were indoctrinated under Mao's regime:

The daily [...] memorizing of *The Quotations of Chairman Mao*, which were collected together [...] known as "The Little Red Book." Everyone was given a copy and told to cherish it "like our eyes." Every day we chanted passages from it over and over again in unison. I still remember many verbatim (Chang 278).

Besides, the regime capitalizes on the people's subconscious fear of anarchy and wins converts to its cause, often making them active agents in spreading the state propaganda. The subjects who value social order and harmony come to believe that appropriate norms are to be prescribed for social behavior, as they come from a "higher authority" (Chang 11). Hannah Arendt comments on how the subjects thus become complicit in their own subjugation, whether it entails managing a Nazi camp in Germany or running a labour camp or turning a blind eye to the disappearance of neighbours or friends... (Arendt, *The Origins* 341).

### **The Panoptic Gaze of the State**

Any belief, value, or behaviour that is considered inconsistent with the prevailing social norms is perceived as a threat by the State. (Feldman 50). Shirin Ebadi writes, "The previous week I had received a threatening letter in the mail, [...]. The letter read: "If you continue your work, both you and your daughter Nargess will be taken care of" (Ebadi 38). All the Orwellian predictions seem to be coming true. Values of civilized life seem to be on the wane, as individuals who are found to adhere to such values come under attack of these powerful States. Shirin Ebadi speaks of how the citizens are under surveillance twenty-four hours of the day, and the state propaganda trumps free speech and thought, "All the neighbours and local shop owners suspected that the recently arrived newspaper seller was an intelligence agent (whose job it is to) monitor the comings and goings from my office". (Ebadi 55)

Often, the subjects lack the political experience or social imagination to watch from which direction the objects of aggression were issuing forth. As Alvarez writes, there were spies everywhere appointed by the Benefactor Trujillo, even within the Mirabel household.

Then there had been the silence that always followed any compromising mention of the regime in public. One could never be sure who in a group might report what to the police. Every large household was said to have a servant on double payroll. (Alvarez 73)

### **Precarious Condition of Intellectuals and Artists**

Artists, intellectuals, writers, and poets are outspoken when the State impinges on their rights or violates their freedom. They are often quick to protest and register any crimes that are committed against humanity. Hence, they are the first targets of such regimes. Svetlana's *Secondhand Time* depicts harrowing accounts of writers and intellectuals who were subject to the Kremlin gulags under Stalin's rule. Likewise, Jung Chang recalls the violent threats against teachers:

Teachers were better targets than parents, [...]. In practically every school in China, teachers were abused and beaten, sometimes fatally [...] many writers and artists committed suicide after being cruelly beaten and humiliated, ... (Chang 377).

Most often it is the fear of violence, like what happened in Nazi Germany, which compels the freedom-loving individuals to submit themselves to such unjust regimes and tolerate these gross infringement of their liberties. The dynamics of intolerance follows different tenets. In the name of the general good, citizens are subjected to draconian and

dehumanizing laws, like being asked to wear badges proclaiming their ethnicity or political affiliation (*The Origins* 438). Jung Chang recalls the interference of the Red Guards at school:

[...] the Red Guards divided pupils into three categories: “reds,” “blacks,” and “grays”. The “reds” were from the families of “workers, peasants, revolutionary officers, [...]”. The “blacks” were those with parents classified as “landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, bad elements, and rightists”. The “grays” came from ambiguous families such as shop assistants and clerks (Chang 294).

Intellectuals are considered as dangerous, books are burnt, and listening to “other” radio stations is prohibited. One of the Mirabel sisters, in Alvarez’s novel partakes in a forbidden pleasure, “Minerva [...] wraps a towel around the radio and lies under the bed listening to illegal stations. Today she was down there for hours. There was a broadcast of a speech by this man Fidel, who is trying to overturn their dictator over in Cuba. Minerva has big parts memorized” (Alvarez 123).

### **Dialectics of Enlightenment and Fukuyama’s Belied Hope**

Since Renaissance, humanists and philosophers have postulated on the primacy of the individual (Cohrs et. al. 442). Hegel explains the human person as a social being, who thinks and acts in accordance with the zeitgeist of his age (Knapp 590). He argued that the human person cannot attain his or her full glory, unless all the factors of social development, particularly freedom, are properly assured.

With the advent of modernity, and the anti-enlightenment turn, the notion of the primacy of the individual has come to be challenged. Political thinkers, Clyde, Crocket, and Williams ponder over the dilemma confronting every civilized society, i.e., what should be the measure of individual freedom vis-à-vis social control to maintain civic order (Clyde et al. 7). Votaries of individual liberty argue that freedom is a necessary condition which makes possible for individuals to openly exchange views on cherished values of the society and clarify their stance in relation to them (Almagor 11). Quite often, this opposition between individual freedom vis-a-vis social control is resolved by the citizens through voluntarily adopting self-restraint and adhering to social rules for the sake of facilitating harmony and congenial interaction within the social group (Feldman 73). It is, on this logic of social order, and the enticement of material prosperity, that despotic rulers monopolise and perpetuate their power.

The recent 2021 Freedom House Report indicates clearly that we are not yet free of the threat of autocracy. Clearly fascist and totalitarian tendencies are again on the rise. Given the ongoing struggles in different parts of the world, to uphold democracy in countries like Myanmar, Malaysia, Thailand, Bangladesh, even India just to name a few, democracy today is truly under siege (Repucci, & Slipowitz 2021).

### **Conclusion**

The narratives bring us, once again, to ponder on the opening question, “Is democracy today in peril?” Few thinkers of the past have given credit to the chances of democracy, i.e., the one advocated by Fukuyama. Aristotle had described democracy as the

union of autonomous polity with its autonomous citizens (Fukuyama 16). Today, as political philosophers begin to mourn the passing of the enlightenment dream, many sceptics argue that democracy never had much of a chance anyway. They believe that, at best, it was nothing more than a doomed illusion. Political critics, like Hannah Arendt, would have argued that the collapse of democratic illusion was preordained (Whitfield 475). The four writers discussed here animate the important global issue of human rights under such despotic political systems. Their literary accounts expose the deceit and lay bare the official state propaganda. In doing so, they bring to light the gross human rights violations under these totalitarian regimes. They expose the pathology of the oppressors; how they dehumanise the individual citizens through misappropriation of political ideology, or sometimes even religion (Hickman 110), to amplify the suffering of innocent victims under these ruthless regimes.

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## **Pangs of Lacanian Desire, Pleasure & Guilt in the Protagonists of *Wuthering Heights* and *The Guide*: A Comparative Reading**

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### *Abstract*

*Since the days of yore, literature has depicted the real human desires, crisis, expectations, and experiences – tragic, romantic, and traumatic – all across the world. In fact, there are such artefacts in the world literature which give space to sharp attacks of mental anguish, pangs of remorse, pangs of guilt or pangs of disappointment. The fact behind this real depiction is an author's presence within a society as a human being. Whatever he / she sees and experiences can't escape his / her pen especially if he /she is a creative writer. So, an artefact is invariably an outcome of an author's aliveness to his/her surroundings, times and happenings. Even the characters, chosen by an author are lifted among the people he/she comes across in the real society. The creativity of an author has to play its great role in making or shaping everything in a work of art. Since one of literature's greatest gifts is the portrayal of characters who are larger than life and in whom we can recognize matchless motivations, ego crisis, expectations, and emotions with distinctive powers of mind. This has attracted scholars to apply various theories especially psychological for tracing newer depths of meanings in them. Exploring the inner behavioural pangs and psychological conflicts of some of literature's most famous characters by applying psychoanalytic theories to understand their behavior and crisis has added more to our understanding. In this backdrop, initially Freud's and later Lacan's discovery of the dynamic unconscious is arguably the most important contributions to our understanding of the human mind. Further, any psychoanalytical reading reveals newer insights and innovations in an artefact. This paper is a modest attempt to interpret the main characters in Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* and R.K. Narayan's *The Guide* from two different eras, cultures and soils through psychoanalytical lens and thus try to understand their overall pangs of desire, pleasure and crime by applying Lacanian Psychoanalytical tools / framework for tracing newer insights in a comparative literary analysis.*

*Keywords: Desire, Self-Other distinction, objet petit a, Jouissance & Symbolic realm*

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### **Introduction**

*The comparative approach to literature has a dual nature: it brings us closer to what is foreign to us in such a way that we can appropriate it, and at the same time distances us from what is familiar to us so that we can survey it. One never clearly observes what is right in front of our eyes nor what is too distant. The academic study of literature hands us a telescope: one end magnifies, the other reduces . . .*

--Hovedstromninger

*What I would like to draw your attention to, is the function of this desire of the Other, insofar as it makes it impossible for the distinction between the subject and the Other to establish itself once and for all... What needs to be introduced and what is there from the start, latent from the beginning, is that, beyond what the subject demands and what the Other demands from the subject, there is the necessary presence and dimension of what the Other desires.*

--Jacques Lacan

*Desire exists every point in the psychic structure..... Desire is not satiated .  
.. .Because desiring has no final resolution . . . .*

--Jacques Lacan

Comparative Literature is now-a-days a distinctive branch of study in literature all across the world. In fact, it has enabled researchers to make comparisons between / among world, national, and regional writers with each other / one another on different parameters in order to trace out the similarities and differences between/ among them and their writings. Following definition of comparative literature is worth quoting:

The discipline of Comparative Literature ... first, ... means the knowledge of more than one national language and literature, and/or it means the knowledge and application of other disciplines in and for the study of literature and second,... has an ideology of inclusion of the Other, be that a marginal literature in its several meanings of marginality, a genre, various text types, etc. ... ((Steven Totosy de Zepetnek et. al. 5)

In the same vein, Buddhadev Bose, the founder at Jadavpur University of the first full-fledged comparative literature department in India, once stated:

Potentially, India is one of the richest fields for Comparative Literature. The age and complexity of our civilization, the diverse elements that compose it, that “world-hunger” of which Tagore spoke a hundred times ... The history of India is a story of absorption, adaptation and assimilation, of continual coming to terms with foreign influences, and of resistance transformed into response. We have great links with many cultures of the East and West; our religions have influenced Western thought; interest in our arts and literatures ... (10)

Now any comparative literature study primarily focuses on comparison and in this paper, the main characters from *Wuthering Heights* and *Guide*, who are deeply rooted in two different eras, cultures and soils, will be placed under psychoanalytical lens for tracing newer insights and innovations done by the authors in creating great characters of literature. We will see how a British and an Indian novelist share similarities and are different in treating their main characters who experience pangs of Lacanian desire, pleasure and guilt throughout the novels. This paper will answer the following questions:

How do the main characters of *Wuthering Heights* and *The Guide* pass through moments of guilt, crime or pleasure and share similarities or dissimilarities in their pangs of sufferings, desires, and life experiences in a typical Lacanian sense?

Do these characters really suffer in such a way as makes them victims of Lacanian desire domain i.e., Lacanian symbolic realm?



Do they experience Lacanian *self-other* crisis, dichotomy, the loss of *objet petit a* / and *jouissance* / pleasure principle?

## Main Argument

Presently, both comparative and Lacanian studies have gained tremendous scope especially in the contemporary postmodern academic era and research platform and in view of this development this paper investigates, by applying Lacanian framework, Catherine and Heathcliff from *Wuthering Heights* and Raju & Rosie from *The Guide* and trace how they pass through Lacanian concept of *Self-Other* distinction, pangs of desire, pleasure and guilt while performing their roles within these novels. Now, it is better to start with French Freud Lacan who reformulated Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical theory and he is especially remembered for his three psychoanalytical realms. Vincent B. Leitch, George Lynn Cross Research Professor writes in his book *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* about Lacan saying:

For Lacan, there are three "orders" or dimensions in the psyche: "the Symbolic," the "Imaginary" and "the Real." They are all equally important to the formation of subjectivity... The Imaginary originates in the human being's fascination with form.... The Symbolic, in contrast, is a dimension of symbolization into which the human being's body, to the extent that he or she begins to speak, must translate itself ... (1159)

This way, Lacan formulates three concepts – need, demand, and desire – which correspond to the three phases of development or three fields in which humans develop or grow: the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real. All desire generates actually the lack which one experiences while entering the realm of desire or the Lacanian realm of symbolic i.e., the domain of language. In fact, the human world moves round this lack: absence of the real objects designated by signs point to the fact that words have meaning only by virtue of the absence and exclusion of others. To enter language means in reality to become a prey to desire; language, Lacan believes is what hollows being into desire. This desire domain earns the name of Lacanian Other for humans. Lacan believes that humans search for the actual others throughout their lives and while searching, they become victims of their own desires if they fail to earn or win them fully which is referred to as the loss of the *objet petit a*. In this regard, Jacques Lacan states:

*Objet petit a* is both the object of anxiety, the cause of the analysand's desire... *objet petit a* is defined as the leftover, the remainder, the remnant left behind by the introduction of the symbolic in the real... In the discourse of the master, one signifier attempts to represent the subject for all other signifiers, but inevitably a surplus is always produced; this surplus is *objet petit a*, a surplus meaning, and a surplus enjoyment ... (Evans 128-129)

In the light of the above quote, we can say that *objet petit a* remains linked to an imaginary representation of *Jouissance* as fullness. In fact, the truth about desire is somehow present in discourse which never articulates the whole truth about desire: whenever discourse attempts to articulate desire, there is always something absent or missing. On the basis of this fundamental understanding, Lacan maintained throughout his career that desire is the desire of the *Other*. Tyson says:

Our desires, beliefs, biases, and so forth are constructed for us as a result of our immersion in the Symbolic Order, especially as that immersion is carried out by our parents and influenced by their own responses to the Symbolic Order. This is what Lacan means by his claim that “desire is always the desire of the other (See, Seminar Bk. XI: 235).

For Lacan, desire is the main power behind all human acts. He says that desire, a function central to all human experience and behaviour, makes life meaningful. He strongly believes that desire of the other is nothing nameable (see, Lacan, Seminar 2:38 and Seminar BK .XI:235). Desire and *Jouissance* rule human existence and the loss of *Objet petit a* refers to disaster and tragedy for the humans who become victims of the Lacanian realm of imaginary i.e., *self – other* distinction.

We get here reminded of Lacan who says that desire is:

A function central to all human experience and behaviour, makes life meaningful. He strongly believes that desire is everything. In fact, he states that desire is always the desire of the other, nothing nameable. (See, Lacan, *seminar 2:37* and Seminar Bk. XI: 235).

Similarly, Noelle Vahanian states:

Desire is the possibility of satisfaction in language, through language. To desire sex is to be in language, to desire the image of the other, an image of the other, rather than the raw, in itself other that you will never know (Taylor & Winquist 94)

He further states:

Desire is the vital force of creativity, because desire imagines its objects. Desire imagines ideal objects and has to face discrepancies with ordinariness... Desire is a word in a world and is all that is the case. Thus, to desire is to think, to speak, to write to read: in sum, it is to live in a world that knows no other world. (Taylor & Winquist 94)

Now a thorough reading of Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights* and Narayan’s *The Guide* reveals that these are truly heavily pregnant with Lacanian aforementioned notions especially desire domain. Bronte has portrayed very powerfully the strength of pangs of desire, guilt, and compulsive forces repressed in the minds of Catherine and Heathcliff. Both Catherine and Heathcliff heavily experience particularly moments of Lacanian Symbolic. Catherine emerges as an evident instance of Lacanian tragedy of desire in the novel. She passes through pangs of desire, pleasure and guilt right from the beginning of the novel due to her search for the real *objet petit a*. Her Lacanian ‘Other’ oscillates between Edgar and Heathcliff. Her tragedy is that she is torn between these two men. Catherine makes it clear when she compares her desire for Linton to the seasons, and her desire for Heathcliff to the rocks. She says:

My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods. Time will change it, I’m well aware, as winter changes the trees ... my love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath - a source of little visible delight, but necessary. (Bronte 86)

Soon we feel that Catherine's friendship, courtship and marriage to Edgar was a seven-year-long diversion which made her to repress the pain of separation, otherwise intolerable, from Heathcliff. Catherine due to her loss of *objet petit a* and the horror experiences, after losing her romantic dreams with Heathcliff, screams continuously, describing herself ‘dreadful’ and calls herself: ‘the wife of a stranger; an exile and an outcast, thenceforth, from what had been

my world'. She talks about the futility of her day-to-day life, in contrast to the power of her suicidal desire for union with Heathcliff beyond the grave:

... the whole last seven years of my life grew a blank! I did not recall that they had been at all. [I was] ... the wife of a stranger; an exile, and outcast, thenceforth, from what had been my world - You may fancy a glimpse of the abyss where I grovelled! (Bronte 130)

Catherine admires and worships Heathcliff but she sees him below her stature and indeed incomparable to the social status that Edgar would provide her. As such, she suffers heavily on account of her guilt of betraying Edgar. She says:

It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff, now; so he shall never know how I love him: and that, not because he's handsome, Nelly, but because he's more myself than I am... (Bronte 84).

Immediately, after marriage Cathy experiences pangs of desire which result finally in her death. She says:

I *am* Heathcliff – he's always, always in my mind – not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself – but as my own being – so don't talk of our separation again – it is impracticable (Bronte 86)

This is an evident instance of Lacanian desire domain. Cathy's longing for Heathcliff is intense throughout the novel. Similarly, Heathcliff's center of being is Cathy. He experiences extreme pangs of guilt, the *self-other* crisis and this way his loss fully resembles Lacanian loss of *objet petit a*. Thereafter, he does crime after crime for gaining his lost object of love i.e., his desire domain but his dream isn't realized and he passes through heavy pangs of guilt, pain and suffering. Heathcliff says:

You teach me now how cruel you've been — cruel and false. Why did you despise me? Why did you betray your own heart, Cathy? I have not one word of comfort. You deserve this. You have killed yourself. ... (Bronte 166)

This shows clearly how Heathcliff too becomes victim of Lacanian desire domain. It also makes evident the fact that losing of Lacanian *objet petit a* changes Heathcliff completely and he now thinks of crime only. He, being broken and tortured, searches for Lacanian *other* and thus experiences suffering and pain.

For both, to earn union was impractical and beyond realization. Being frustrated by the circumstances, separation and the societal pressures, she says to her husband: 'I don't want you, Edgar; I'm past wanting you' (Bronte 133). After Catherine experiences, Lacanian loss of *jouissance* and pleasure principle, she eagerly longs and wants 'to be half savage and free again'. She feels very sorry for meaningless and pointless adulthood. She says: "Why I am so changed? Why does my blood rush into a hell of tumult at a few words?" (Bronte 131) In the same vein, Heathcliff feels that the division of *self* is quite intolerable. This implies that he fails to accept the Lacanian *self-other* distinction. He says: 'Oh God! Would you like to live with your soul in the grave?' (Bronte 166) Heathcliff goes for a 'long fight' in order to avenge all those who were responsible for keeping him away from his Lacanian *objet petit a* or beloved (i.e., Cathy). He has only 'one universal idea ... I have a single wish, and my whole being and faculties are yearning to attain it.' which is to rejoin Catherine via the grave. (Bronte 337).

Now in Narayan's *Guide*, Raju and Rosie too become victims of desire while searching for Lacanian *Other*. Raju an ardent admirer of Rosie's art would boost her confidence to such an extent that she is emboldened to revolt against her husband's orders.

However, she suffers from noticeable pangs of guilt / fear and appears mostly sure about what she wants from life. Marco dubs her: “A woman who will go to bed with anyone...” (Narayan 152), words which appear true as she submits her body to Raju for realizing her passion, artistic talents and for earning Lacanian *Jouissance* – the lost pleasures of her typical human desires. Marco ignores his young beautiful wife and this forces her to lead her own life searching for her lost *Other* and hence she gradually falls in love with her only companion, Raju for earning the Lacanian lost pleasure or her lost *Other* or *objet petit a*.

After Raju's imprisonment, Rosie left to herself, undergoes a process of self-discovery and her freedom enables her to win her ‘*self*’ or even ‘*ego*’. In fact, her intimacy and freedom irritates Raju’s mother who leaves him to his fate. Living like a married couple to all appearances, we understand that Rosie gains her ‘lost *Other*’ in Raju, the Railway guide, who does everything for giving recognition to Rosie’s demands. It is undoubtedly ‘Raju’s obsession with the dancing girl’ which enables Raju to remain caught in Lacanian imaginary / *self* – *other* dichotomy and the search for ‘*Other*’. He forgets everything in order to make Rosie realize that he is her lost ‘*Other*’ – *objet petit a* – one who replaces / substitutes her husband. She asks him point blank:

Can you show me a cobra — a king cobra it must be - which can dance to the music of a flute?” (Narayan 64).

He replied: “I can show you a cobra ...She looked delighted” (Narayan 66).

Soon Raju took her to the man who had a king cobra and he got ready to show Rosie the Cobra dance. Here, Raju confesses that

The whole thing repelled me but it seemed to fascinate the girl. She watched it swaying with the raptest attention. She stretched out her arm slightly and swayed it in imitation of the movement; she swayed her whole body to rhythm - for just a second, but that was sufficient to tell me what she was the greatest dancer of the century (Narayan 68).

After sometime she wanted to know from Raju:

Are you also like him ...Do you also hate to see me dance? (Narayan 121)

Raju replied:

Not at all. What makes you think so? (Narayan 21)

She further says:

At one time you spoke like a big lover of art, but now you never give it a thought. ...

It was true. I said something in excuse, clasped her hands in mine, and swore earnestly, ‘I will do anything for you. I will give my life to see you dance. Tell me what to do. I will do it for you’ (Narayan 121- 122).

Marco makes it clear to Rosie: “Don’t expect me to go with you. I can’t stand the sight of a snake; your interests are morbid” (Narayan 64). But far from encouragement, Marco compels her to give up dancing for a respectable life. This way she suffers from pangs of desire / fear/ a bruised inward life and becomes a pure victim of her husband’s indifference, suffering psychologically from mental anguish. Raju understands this fully and enables Rosie to reach the heights of her career. With his assistance and concern, her life becomes meaningful. We find that her fascinating dance performances turn her soon into celebrity and she basks in the glory of popularity’ (Lakshmi 29). He makes her to dance and thus realize her long cherished goal and lost *Other*. This fixes him tightly to Rosie who too in return continues firmly with Raju, her own *Other* (of Lacanian brand) and acquires long cherished

recognition or status in the society. Thus, ‘Rosie successfully wriggles out of her psychological trauma, attains her cherished ambition of becoming an accomplished dancer, ending up triumphant’ (Lakshmi 29). Similarly, Raju wins or earns his *Lacanian desire* domain while spending his time in Rosie’s company. He finds in her pangs of pleasure fully filled. He thus says: “I viewed her as a pure abstraction. She could make me forget my surroundings ...Suddenly she stopped and flung her whole weight on me with ‘what a darling. You are giving me a new lease of life’” (Narayan 125); “She needed my inspiring presence” (Narayan 182). In short, Raju’s obsession with the dancer Rosie whom he dubs ‘lovely and elegant’ (Narayan 65) is the best example of an individual’s aspiration for endless passion and unlimited desires.

Finally, we find that though these two novelists come from two different geographical locations, cultures, milieus, eras – one is from the Victorian era of Britain and the other is from the 20<sup>th</sup> century India – yet it is proved that they share a lot especially when their creations / works are placed under Lacanian lens. It becomes quite clear that pangs of all sorts are more prominent, stronger and heavier in Cathy and Heathcliff than in Raju and Rosie. This study also makes quite evident that there are a few similarities in terms of Lacanian notions but more of dissimilarities with which these characters are heavily filled even in terms of pangs of pleasure, guilt and desire.

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# **The Mother Archetype: A Reflection of Nurturing Mother Figures in the Fiction of Toni Morrison and Bhabani Bhattacharya**

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## *Abstract*

*This critique focuses on the reflection of mother archetypes, as the nourishing and fostering images, painted by Toni Morrison and Bhabani Bhattacharya in their respective fiction. Both of them have created many pieces of artistic fiction. Not all of them have been included in the scope of study; rather, it is a concise description of an all-embracing study. There are many notable characters under consideration, some nameless and the others with unforgettable names, some disregarded and the others valued. The attempt here is to identify, analyze, appreciate and value the significant role of a mother in creative writing and also in reality. In order to nurture and raise not only her own children but also the entire humanity, she has to take many decisions: sacrificial, critical and sometimes even weird. This paper epitomizes various mother figures, their thoughts, their feelings, their ideas, their attitudes, their psychology and also their actions. Four novels of Morrison, i.e. The Bluest Eye, Sula, Song of Solomon and Beloved, and four novels of Bhattacharya, i.e. So Many Hungers!, Music for Mohini, Shadow from Ladakh and A Dream in Hawaii are taken for the study.*

*Keywords: Mother figures, nurturing, motherhood, motivator, preserver of culture, self-sacrifice.*

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## **Introduction**

Woman has always played several roles and performed a variety of duties. Thousands of literary masterpieces project remarkable women characters in different appearances, like a victim, a fighter, a rebel, an idol and even an outsider. The most revered concept of womanhood is the motherly attitude or the mother archetype. Not only the actual mothers but all women, in general, display this motherly instinct. She possesses an immeasurable heart that cares for her own dear ones, the others and even the entire human order. “In women lie nature's best qualities of motherhood, compassion, humanity and love. Because they have been blessed with the capacity for giving and nurturing life, women also have the capacity for a deep commitment for preserving and nourishing not only their own offspring, but of the entire planet as well” (Jain, 2003). There are two aspects of a mother; positive and negative. But what appears to be negative at the ostensible level, is actually a hidden feature of her maternal instincts. Such protective and loving mother figures have been painted intensely by both Toni Morrison and Bhabani Bhattacharya. Both the authors

considered here belong to cultures, demography and milieu which are poles apart. Moreover, they are opposite in gender also. Whereas Morrison is a black womanist writer, Bhattacharya is a male author with high regards for females. Her focus is on actual concerns of African-American woman, and his central female characters are idealized and eulogized Indian women. What unites the dissimilarities between them is the portrayal of universal image of motherhood. The mother figures in their novels rise above the gender, racial, environmental and cultural limits imposed on fiction.

### **Discussion & Analysis**

The mother in Morrison holds the bizarre combination of love and destruction. But it is the model of mother through which Morrison broadcasts her feminist ideas and need of the collective experiences for holistic development of a human being. Her mother figures hold the notion of interdependence at the center. Their concern is not only the issues related to women but the wider evils prevalent in world with no regard to gender, region, caste and color. They are aware of the power of black folk culture. They do not aspire for a utopian world, but work for the strengthening of actual communal connections. The mothers of Morrison know the impact of slavery, subjugation and suffocation on feminine psychology. She has presented mothers who are sometimes self-destructive and at times are self-sufficient. For Instance, she has depicted two contrastive mothers, Pauline and Mrs. MacTeer in her very first novel, i.e. *The Bluest Eye*. Both are black mothers, but have dissimilar mentality. Pauline, in her sub-consciousness, deems herself to be unattractive. This notion has turned her into an apathetic mother and a lonely person. She is lame foot and also breaks her tooth; this implants the idea of self-ugliness and self-destruction in her psyche even more. In fact, her deformed foot symbolizes her deformed mentality. She also thinks that her loveless and bitter married life has marred her dreams. This is why; she takes refuge in watching romantic films and takes good care of the family of her well-to-do white masters. She even overlooks her own daughter and family, which is why her daughter, Pecola grows into an insecure person. Pauline causes a lot of anguish for Pecola, but still she wins the sympathy of the narrator, author and even the readers. Her imaginary life ruins the actual life of her daughter. Her life is nothing but a delusion which infuses in her a “general feeling of separateness and unworthiness.” (*BE*, 88) Therefore, she is not an ideal mother figure. Mrs. Macteer, on the other hand, also has two daughters Frieda and Claudia. But she has no illusionary and pensive thinking. She lives in reality. She is a strict and sometimes a callous mother. But she guards and loves her children and infuses self-confidence in them. Unlike Pecola, her daughters are not victims of a dreamy life. Thus, the mother figure in the novel is not only the sadistic one like Pauline but also nurturing figure like Mrs. MacTeer.

Morrison has also illustrated some other features of woman in her further images of mother, e.g. in *Sula*. Her depiction of Hannah, the mother of Sula, and Eva, the mother of Hannah is extraordinary. Hannah, like all mothers, influences the lifestyle of her daughter Sula. Her daughter also follows her footsteps and sleeps with many men. She is a bold character. After the death of her husband, who dies very early, she has many love-affairs with the men who take a fancy for her. She is the object of resentment for a lot of females in



the community, but no one hates her because she is an amiable and affable woman. However, she is also a self-destructive character like Pauline, and cannot connect with her daughter. She fails to establish a bond with others; she tries, but is incompetent to do so. This happens because of the coldness of her mother, Eva, who could not raise her properly. She beds with many men to achieve the ever missing maternal love of her life. The same attitude is seen in her daughter, Sula. Hannah could not become a good mother, as she was not mothered in a good manner. An even more ambiguous character is Eva. She is a classic mother whose husband abandons her, but she struggles hard to shield her children and save them from being starved. She does not become a sex object and sacrifices her leg to raise money for the family. She is controversial, as she kills her son Plum by putting fire on him because of his drug addiction; but she is also the one who tries to save her daughter Hannah from being burnt by jumping from the second storey window, almost killing herself. She is not a self-destructive, rather a self-sacrificing mother. Her readiness to sacrifice for her children makes her conventional an ideal mother, but the way she sacrifices is really unconventional. She denies the traditional characteristics of motherliness. Her definitions of life and maternal love are eccentric. She reflects it in her response, “talkin' 'bout did I love you girl I stayed alive for you.” (*Sula*, 69) Her concern for taking care of her progeny and not letting her kids die of hunger makes her ~~so-eold~~ extraordinary. She is a pathetic character not because of her physical disability but due to her maternal incapability.

The next novel by Morrison, i.e. *Song of Solomon* is a tale of three generations of a family, with the main focus on the male character, Milkman. There are many influential female characters also who help him accomplish his mission. But, the prominent mother icons are Pilate Dead and Ruth Foster Dead, his aunt and mother. Pilate is a brave and unselfish mother. She has dedicated her whole life for the progress of her children and also the others. She proves to be a kind mother for her daughter Rebecca. She also nurtures her grand-daughter Hagar and guides her nephew Milkman safe and sound. She is the actual protagonist of the story, as she morally directs the path of Milkman. Like a true guide, she helps Milkman trace his long-forgotten roots. She tries to foster freedom and autonomy in her granddaughter. However she fails to pass on her mental energy either to Rebecca or Hagar. The reason is her nurturing them protectively, not letting them face the hardships of life. She always attempts to please and ease the kids in the family. She is not violently defensive, but this does not mean she is weak. In order to rescue Rebecca from a powerful man's beating, she presses on a knife inside an inch of his heart and convinces him not to bother her daughter again. She is a much romanticized version of Morrison's mother figure. She is the mouthpiece of Morrison, who always protects and preserves the black folklore. The supernatural mothers like Pilate “challenge stereotypes associated with black women as the authoritative matriarch ... and the careless pariah. They worry about their families, even when their actions are unorthodox. In their own ways, they are both a progressive force, courageous spirits that inspire and help their family move forward without forgetting their past.” (Oliveira, 161) Whereas Pilate is a determined character, Ruth is a passive and silent woman. For financial aid she depends on Pilate, for emotional support she relies on her father and her husband. Consequently, she fails to grow into a strong-minded woman. Her nervous mindset and frailty affect her two daughters also. She is an immature and naïve

mother. However, she is not always submissive. She goes against the wish of her husband to abort her child. Her husband compels her to insert needles into her womb to harm the unborn child, but she saves the fetus by injecting them moderately. Her only achievement in life is giving birth to her son. She also avoids her husband's dislike regarding her visiting the grave of her father. But the fact remains, without Pilate she could not have been a good mother.

In *Beloved*, Morrison has penned the most complicated black slave mother Sethe. She is a self-governing and proud mother filled with tremendous love and commitment for her children. Her own mother is unknown to her, but she possesses excellent maternal instincts. She loves her kids so much because she could not get love from her mother. During her slave days, she puts her own life to risk to rescue her kids. She undergoes severe sexual, mental, spiritual and emotional agony as a slave that she tries to kill her children out of her protective affection for them to set them free. But she gathers the guts to kill only her small baby girl. She justifies her murder, "if I hadn't killed her she would have died." (*Beloved*, 200) But she gets life time psychological imprisonment due to her act of infanticide. She never gets out of that tragic time and is always obsessive of her past; "her brain was not interested in the future. Loaded with the past and hungry for more, it left her no room to imagine." (*Beloved*, 71) She suffers a double repression, i.e. one due to her past experiences of servitude, and second, due to her daughter's ghost whom she murdered. She does not want her children to be treated as animals like her. So, she takes the extreme step of giving liberty to her children by killing them. Thus, the novel serves "as an insightful and frightening depiction of the capacity of mother love to generate paradoxically brutal acts of uncompromised compassion in a world warped and distorted by a slave culture. Virtually all the mother-child relationships in *Beloved* bear the consequences of slavery." (Otten, 84-85) It will not be an exaggeration to state that the mothers of Morrison are iconic examples of love, patience, self-sacrifice, fortitude and extraordinary courage.

Bhattacharya, to give a realistic touch to his narrative, avoids giving the mother character a name; rather, he tries to elevate her position by calling her either 'Jayadev's mother', 'Kajoli's mother', 'Onu's mother', etc. Many feminist critics have objected to this sort of treatment because they find it a denial of the personal identity of a woman; but in reality this is the traditional practice meant to pay due respect to motherhood. Bhattacharya's mothers are not mere symbols; they are palpable realities and individuals with their own motivations and ideals. Mother of the protagonist Kajoli has been delineated with care and precision in *So Many Hungers!*. She has an image of an ideal loving mother, which has been presented through several incidents, throughout the course of narrative. Like archetypal mother, she takes care of her children as well as the whole mankind. She is benevolent, and exudes her generosity by instructing her son-in-law Kishore to donate whole of the rice to the laborers working in the farmland: "If we eat, our Kisan brethren and their kin shall eat. The rice is as much theirs as ours Kishore; for it has grown from the sweat of their chests. The money we have paid them as harvest wage is nothing. Man eats food, not money." (*SMH*, 102) The mother does not care for her own needs in the process of helping others, which confirms her consistent faith in human values of goodness and kindness. She is full of morality and fortitude. Although she tries to commit suicide due to low spirits, she passes on her ethics and psychological stamina in her progeny. "Woman as a symbol of sacrifice is

shown in the character of Kajoli's mother attempting suicide to remove the burden of hunger from her children." (Singh, 84)

Similarly the mother of Jayadev, in *Music for Mohini*, is not a complex soul and has a very simple purpose of living her life. Like a conservative Indian mother, she tries to elevate the status of her son, Jayadev after the death of her husband. She is so concerned with the wellbeing of her son that when he is ailing, she takes an oath in front of God to eat only with her left hand. Her extreme spirituality and unfathomable faith in God make her offer the right hand only for worship: "The mother dedicated her right hand to Shiva at the Holy City past twice ten years, for the health of her son who was then a little sickly, all skin and bone because of spleen and fever. She may not use the right hand at meals, since it was given to the deity and would be defiled by the touch of the mouth. These twice ten years she's eaten with the fingers of the left hand only. A Hindu mother's true sacrifice for her son. May be such an act of faith is mocked in the cities where women are insincere and tough." (*MFM*, 85) But she is also a staunch supporter of orthodoxy and old values. Hence, she imposes many a constraint on Mohini, her daughter-in-law. She is the preserver of classical, cultural code of conduct, and limits the lifestyle of Mohini. But she does all this to cause her daughter-in-law to behave and act with responsibility as the mistress of the home, not to trouble her. No doubt, she is strict and stern, her every thought and action is for the welfare of her home.

The later novels of Bhattacharya present a changing attitude in the treatment of traditional Indian motherhood. The image of Suruchi, as a mother, in *Shadow from Ladakh*, has greater depth and complexity. It is most painful for Suruchi, a mother, to see her daughter, Sumita, growing up in an austere life-pattern, and completely lacking the feelings and desires that girls usually have at her age. The biggest sacrifice on the part of Suruchi, as a mother, is to helplessly witness and allow her husband, Satyajit, to cast her daughter in his own mold of asceticism. As a result, Sumita grows without any chance of initiation into real life, imitating only the image of her father. Suruchi feels a deep sense of regret: "She never had a hand in molding Sumita's mind and her destiny. She had been a mere onlooker in all the years past, watching Sumita turn more and more into the image conceived by Satyajit." (*SL*, 301) But, later on, she realizes her nurturing duty, and the suppressed motherly rebellion becomes so strong in Suruchi that in any circumstance, she is not ready to allow her daughter to lead an ascetic life, which she herself has been leading since few years after marriage. Thus, she is a modern mother working well for her daughter' broadening of vision.

Bhattacharya depicts an exception in the mother figure with the presentation of the mother of Devjani, the heroine of *A Dream in Hawaii*. Although mother is the consecrator of cultural values, the sustainer of life and the positive power, the appearance of the mother is now tempered with the lived veracity of life, and her image is no longer idealized beyond recognition. Apart from the basic motherly characteristics, Devjani's mother has been presented as a mere human being with an aberration generated by unfulfilled physical hunger by her husband, leading to her affair with another man. But she is the only tainted mother in the whole of Bhattacharya. Devjani is flabbergasted on viewing her mother with her lover in bed: "An integral part of her died in that span of time. She could have no understanding, no pity, and no forgiveness for the naked woman in bed . . . whose beauty she had adored. What

lay destroyed was far more than a daughter's illusion about her Mother . . . naked bodies in bed - recaptured images would haunt her vision and make her nauseated.” (*DH*, 79) However, she does so because her husband never gives her the time and love, a wife deserves and needs. And, as the narrative unfolds, she gets forgiveness from her daughter along with the readers.

## Conclusion

The presence of a mother is very important for the overall development of children. During the formative years of children, mother plays important and significant roles in molding and shaping their personality. In turn, they automatically learn habits and qualities of the mother. She even infuses confidence, courage, patience, optimism and strength in her children. The mother does not lose faith in human values of goodness and usefulness, because, even stark hardship and strain does not destroy her faith in them. However, occasionally she has to take some harsh and strange decisions for her family. One cannot understand the motherliness. Whatever a mother does is for creating a congenial atmosphere for the survival of her offspring. Thus, the children who have been brought up in a healthy atmosphere always have faith in life and humanity, despite misfortunes and hard times. In keeping with the earlier African and Indian tradition, the women portrayed as mother archetypes, in the novels of Morrison and Bhattacharya, are capable of great sacrifices. They adhere to the path of goodness and helpfulness. Therefore, almost all these novels clearly present mother's influence in a positive form.

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# Tracing the Nexus of Gender with Transnational Migration in Select South Asian Fiction: A Study

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## *Abstract*

*Human migration movements perhaps are the most dynamic social, economic as well as political process of the current time. The rise in the human mobility and the growing complexity of migratory patterns have contributed to transnational migration so much that it has become a global issue of priority. Perceiving transnational migration as a greater phenomenon would also include evaluation of the gendered responses towards it. Transnational migration affects men and women differently and needs different parameters of study. However, when it comes to the women migratory narratives full attention and critical focus are due. A deeper level of reading of the two fictional texts from South Asia, Manjushree Thapa's Seasons of Flight (2012) and Nadia Hashimi's When the Moon is Low (2015) shall not only initiate the need of feminist methodologies for a critical understanding of the female refugee crisis while undergoing the process of transnational migration but also justify the existence of feminized migratory tales along with establishing the importance of feminist approach towards transnational migration.*

*Keywords: Gendered responses, refugee crisis, transnational migration, female migratory narratives, South Asian fiction.*

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## **Introduction**

Transnational migration renders different experiences to both men and women. Because of the upsurge in the employment opportunities and flexibility in the work space, an expansion is seen in the destination countries undergoing complementary economic, demographic, and social changes, favorable for the female migrant workers. Extensive research in the migration studies has highlighted the partial denial of the assessment of the gender roles and its relation to the migration. Peggy Levitt et al in their article, 'International Perspective on Transnational Migration: An Introduction' finds,

The ways in which transnational migration is gendered is another area that has not received sufficient attention. While gender is considered fully in some of the analyses in their volume than others, most of our contributors agree that gender is a central organizing principle of migrant life, that transnational migration affects men and women differently and that it alters relations between them. (Levitt et al, 568)

Lack of synchronized theoretical underpinning in this area has definitely made it clear that there is a need of analyzing the gender roles in terms of migration. In their transnational relocation narratives, the females try to express their ways of coping up the different situations, the need of survival and settling down. Transnational migration may not only

increase women's access to higher education, health and hygiene, proper job opportunities but also increases the risk for women becoming prey of human trafficking and exploitation. Mary Anne Warren in her book, *Gendercide* argues that social policies regarding population control and reproductive technology are designed to limit and at times to eradicate the existence of women. The decoding of the female narratives in relation to the transnational migration is not only important to understand the complexities and patterns of gendered responses but also to encourage the feminized migratory tales, contributing to the transnational gender studies.

Incorporation of gender in the migration studies can be dated back to 1970s and 1980s which has continued to evolve with time. Stephanie J. Nawyn from the Sociology discipline, finds in her article, 'Gender and Migration: Integrating Feminist Theory into Migration Studies' that,

The integration of gender analysis in migration studies first emerged in the 1970s and early 1980s with a conception of gender as an individual-level, static category determined at birth. (Nawyn 2)

The association of women with the process of transnational migration has roused many questions because in earlier times, the globe never saw, or wanted to see the women who had taken the migration decision all alone, headed the journey and executed all by themselves. The past is glorified with men and their achievements but to re-do the history, scrutiny of the female narratives is must. Women had also migrated, most of the times with the family and sometimes all alone, crossed fearlessly several boundaries and challenges but they were hardly praised or represented in the history of migration. Helene Cixous in her most celebrated essay 'The Laugh of the Medusa' had said, "the future must no longer be determined by the past" (Cixous 92), hence the incorporation of the feminist approach to transnational migration perhaps can be sought as the way to fill up the absence of gender in migration studies.

Female migratory narratives are the description of the felt and lived experiences, sometimes communal or personal stories, re-told by the women themselves. By interpreting the migratory narratives, the scholarship can achieve a much stronger understanding of the gender roles, the female refugee crisis, the power equation of male and the dominant ideologies that works upon the society. Transnational Migration may improve the financial situation, self-esteem and even the decision-making capability among women. The new found autonomy may transform their lives in many ways or may be the most complicated phenomenon, involving endless challenges which are confronted fearlessly by some female but some break down during the process mentally as well as physically.

### **Fictional Representation of the Refugee Crisis; Gendered Responses to the Transnational Migration**

Manjushree Thapa's *Seasons of Flight* and Nadia Hashimi's *When the Moon is Low* has been taken up for scrutiny, keeping in mind the fact that, the migration journey has been undergone by female protagonists. These two fictions locate two different places on earth i.e Nepal and Afghanistan but the focal point of the two fictions is that both the texts introduce transnational migratory experience undertaken by female protagonists belonging to the South Asian countries, here Nepal and Afghanistan respectively as their origin point for

undertaking the process of migration. Manjushree Thapa with her Nepali experience and Nadia Hashimi with her American-Afghani experience has linked gender and transnational migration, shown through their fictions in order to contribute their vision to the migration and gender studies. Manjushree Thapa and Nadia Hashimi, introduces female leads in their respective fiction to narrate their arduous journey of crossing international boundaries and settling in newer regions, all by themselves. As the female migrants lands up in the host country, they are confronted with becoming the new ethnic minorities, who must adapt and adept to the various socio-cultural and political pressures which they hadn't anticipated before migration.

Whether it is a forced migration or wishful migration, what matters the most are the situations that had compelled refugees to decide to leave their own country to settle down in other places. Decision making is a socio-psychological, subjective, cognitive process while migrant decisions are always backed up by socio-political and economic reasons. Lea Muller Funk, in her research article, 'Adapting to staying, or imagining futures elsewhere: Migration decision-making of Syrian refugees in Turkey' stresses upon the importance upon the decision-making process in the part of the migrant's journey of migration process. Since time immemorial, decision making has always been associated with the man who has the power to take stronger, bolder decisions in a patriarchal set up. Subverting the patriarchal stereotypes, the female protagonist, Prema and Fereiba from *Seasons of Flight* and *When the Moon is Low* takes decisions to transgress the national borders.

In *Seasons of Flight*, the readers are confronted with the character of Prema who is ambitious enough to build a strong identity out of an established career. But one should note that her strong personality was the result of the limitations in her native country. Her decision to migrate to and settle down in America can be read as her resistance to her belongingness to a "Third World nation" (Thapa 123). The pain was so profound that it resulted in her associating her own language Nepali as "the language of her sorrows" (Thapa 123). Whereas, in *When the Moon is Low* the decision to escape was the only resort left for people like Fereiba in Kabul. She exclaimed that, she "was relieved to be planning our (their) escape and fearful of leaving home." (Hashimi 96). Thus, in the two texts, the female migrants are seen resisting their existence in a hostile environment in their countries by deciding to route out to some other parts for economic, financial and social security.

Manjushree Thapa's text *Seasons of Flight* represents the time when Nepal was infected by most serious political and security implications i.e., Maoist rebellion. Being there at Kathmandu, young career concerned women like Prema had certain limitations. The war had pushed her out of her own country and it was the war that repelled her from going back there. However, the novel does not delve deep into the factors causing the war and conflict; even does not present a brutal war condition. The protagonist, Prema, was far more affected by the claustrophobic situation of Nepal, caused by war and conflicts in comparison to the other characters in the novel. It is Prema's sister, Vijaya who comes forward and joins the Maoist rebellion. The contrast is evident where the two daughters of the same family choose different paths; Prema who decides to migrate to the United States of America and on the other hand, the readers find the character of Vijaya, who stays back at Nepal, faces the upheaval.

Nadia Hashimi's *When the Moon is Low* travels to the time when Kabul's inner peace was poisoned with the fundamentalist regime. The country was suffering a lot because

of the push and pull between the Soviet Union and Mujahideen, Afghanistan's freedom fighters. Days were worsening as

more children limped to school, their limbs amputated by explosives disguised as dolls or toy ... (Hashimi 90).

At Kabul, working people like Fereiba were like "Professional stripped of profession" (Hashimi 96). Life had changed for Fereiba and her children when, once, a group of Talibani men entered their home, looking for Mahmood Waziri, their father. They took Mahmood with them for never to return. Reacting against the war-stricken Kabul, Fereiba and her children had no other option other than migrating to England, the land of her dream and emplacement.

In my youth, Europe was the land of fashion and sophistication...Kabul admired the fair-complexioned imperialists beyond the Ural Mountains. We battled our eyelashes at them and blended their refinement with our tribal exoticism. (Hashimi 1)

In the novel *When the Moon is Low*, the relatives of Fereiba had stayed back even though Kabul was developing deteriorated living conditions. It is Fereiba and her husband who had dreamt of moving out and their wish to migrate to England remained incomplete with the unexpected assassination of Mahmood Waziri by the fundamentalists. But Fereiba and her children took a bold decision of routing out of their homeland on their own. Thus, in both fictions, focusing only upon the migrants, the writers do not put light upon the lives who had chosen to remain at their own homeland. Hence, there remains unaddressed scope of comparing and contrasting the position of migrated characters with the non-migrated ones.

Kevin. M. Dunn regards that, "Moving is expensive and troubling, and it is still difficult to get bodies across national borders. Again, the crossing of borders is easier for some bodies than others...And peoples' mobility continues to be embedded within places and networks" (Dunn, 23). The responses and the nature of refugee crisis of both Prema and Fereiba are different because Prema takes her readers into her mental journey of transnational migration whereas Fereiba showcases her mental as well as physical migratory journey. The whole process of migration was not so difficult for Prema as she had won the Green Card Lottery, and continued her journey through legal means but Fereiba had succumbed to illegal transnational migration and thus, she understood that she had "actually set off a journey so dangerous with three small children" (Hashimi 120) and "wondered if she had made the right choice" (Hashimi 120).

The transnational migration brings up before the women, the issues of assimilation and negotiation with the hostile situation in a new settlement. Bo Yong Lee justifies the complicated process of assimilation as:

It is true that some degree of assimilation is inevitable, but its extent and significance are subject to debate. Several factors, such as the formation of the ethnic niches and transnational activities affect the assimilation process in terms of degree and speed (Lee 4).

In *Seasons of Flight*, Prema was having identity crisis as she could not locate her country Nepal before the Americans. She had to either place Nepal near India, or had to relate the country with Mount Everest. Assimilation and negotiation became the urgent need for Prema and she was seen gradually getting accustomed to the changes and peculiarities of America:



She came to recognize pelicans, cormorants, sanderlings...she began to note the coincidence of the tide and moonrise, and to wonder at the life in the splash zone and the depth (Thapa 45).

For Prema, "America kept unfolding" (Thapa, 188) and to understand the ways and patterns of America, she was trying hard with all sort of patience to assimilate in the country, be it even by initiating 'casual sex' (Thapa, 32). In *When the Moon is Low*, Fereiba had repetitively undergone the process of assimilation in the different countries they had stayed. When she had reached Iran, Fereiba found that "Iran had opened its doors and accepted hordes of Afghans as refugees" (Hashimi 127) But Iran was never their plan, she with her children had further moved on with their journey. When Fereiba had reached Tehran, Iran's capital, she had "blended in with Iran's peasant class, migrating across the country in search of a better life" (Hashimi 127). Moreover, after landing in the small Turkish town of Intikal, the first need was to communicate with the people in English. As Fereiba was a teacher, she had command over the English language but the lack of use at Kabul, made her a sort of dumb. Her son, Saleem's English was better than hers, so, it was Saleem who had initiated conversation with the local people to enquire about their stay and source of work.

Nina Glick Schiller et. al says that, "Transnational migration is the process by which immigrants forge and sustain simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement" (Schiller 48). Transnationalism and migration have definitely promoted the concepts of global citizens and citizenship, fluid movement and communication. Both the fictions offer transformed women, be it Prema or Fereiba, both had undergone transition from individual having regional identity to a global one.

Absence of diasporic sensibility has been pointed out by the critics like, Adriana Elena Stoica who has discussed upon the migration studies taking a departure from the methodological nationalism, the concept of diaspora and sense of identity crisis. According to her, "The classical definition of diaspora implies a sense of irremediable rupture with one's homeland paralleled by a wish to return to it and a sense of alienation in the host country... By affording a regime of multiple national belonging the transnational condition discards the connotations of diasporic loss." (Stoican 2) As Prema and Fereiba's migratory journey is conflict induced, even development induced; therefore, in both the fictions the female migrants never wished to go back to Nepal or Kabul.

## Conclusion

According to Erin Trouth Hofmann & Cynthia J. Buckley, women's autonomy (regarding writing migration narratives) can be more strengthened if feminist approach is associated with migration. The inclusion of the gender within the theoretical space of migration studies has definitely reframed the transnational migration studies. From the detailed study of the two contemporary fictional texts from South Asia, the two-migration pattern i.e legal and illegal transnationalism has come to the light. The set of challenges confronted by the female refugees (Prema and Fereiba) during their transnational migration are quite different, hence the nature of their responses too differs. Prema is in a win-win position as compared to Fereiba who had lost all the connections with her son, Saleem during the migration. Moreover, Prema had been successful in reaching her destination physically but it is Fereiba, whose fate does not favour. Starting with the decision making up

to the execution of the migration process, the feminist approach allows us to analyze the gendered responses towards transnational migration. Be it about the re-settlement in a host country, assimilation, or getting emplaced, the female refugees are in constant risk of getting into the traps of human trafficking and rapes. Thus, by tracing the nexus of gender and transnational migration there is a possibility of an interdisciplinary dialogue which may help to extend the reach of migration studies.

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## Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments* - A Reading of Wild and Domestic Nature

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### *Abstract*

*Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's The Forest of Enchantments (2019) posits ecocritical concerns by drawing attention to an underlying androcentrism responsible for the exploitation of both women and non-human entities like plants, animals, rakshasas and asuras. The creation of dualisms like man/woman, nature/culture, civilisation/savagery lies at the heart of such an understanding of the world in the epic. This paper seeks to discuss one such binary of the wild and domestic nature in the novel, frequently exemplified through the spaces and metaphors of the forest and the garden respectively. The palace gardens in Mithila and Ayodhya and the Ashoka Vatika in Lanka are domestic spaces which hint at the containment and taming of the wilderness or of women like Sita who long for the forest and its adventures. The forest of Dandakaranya, on the other hand, is seen as a dangerous space housing rakshasas, asuras and wild beasts and the cleansing of the forest of its evils becomes a way of restoring civilization and attesting to the masculine prowess of kings. The garden and the forest in the novel, the paper argues, thus serve as key points in understanding the wild/domestic binary which is central to ecofeminist readings of the text. Keywords: Indian epic, Divakaruni, Sita, wilderness, taming, nature, forest, garden*

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### **Introduction**

Gardens and forests have long been used to describe aspects of the domestic and wild nature in myths and epics. While the domesticated spaces of the garden invoke the pastoral ideal, the wild spaces of the jungle assume a dark, Gothic view of nature. The pastoral mode is characterized by “a delight in the natural” (Gifford 2) and has its roots in the Garden of Eden (Merchant 7). The Edenic space with its image of lush green grounds, domesticated animals and trees overflowing with all kinds of fruits is equated with the idea of paradisaical bliss and an idyllic bounty in the lap of nature. This pastoral ideal of plenty is also seen in Hindu mythology in the Nandana garden of Indra or Chaitaratha garden of Kubera. The Gothic, on the other hand, presents “nature, wild and untameable” (Botting 8) and is often represented by the forest as a space evoking the fear of the unknown and as an abode of evil. Khandavprastha in the *Mahabharata*, Dandakaranya in the *Ramayana* are some of the spaces which are seen to house *rakshasas* and wild creatures hostile to human beings. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments*, a telling account of the *Ramayana* from the perspective of Sita, questions such received notions of the wild and the domestic by highlighting the patriarchal and anthropocentric ideologies at work in the forming of such notions. Through the figure of Sita, Divakaruni presents to us an ecofeminist

and post-dualist view of the world which sees androcentrism to be at the heart of anthropocentrism (Gaard 6). In other words, the exploitation of both women and non-humans can be found rooted in the same patriarchal ideology. Ecofeminists critically look at the role of language that creates binaries between nature and culture and equates women with nature, emotion, tenderness and domesticity and associates men with culture, reason, dominance and enterprise and technology. In *The Forest of Enchantments*, the equating of domesticated nature with “kindly beneficent female” (Merchant 2) and unruly women with “wild and uncontrollable nature” (Merchant 2) works alongside the nature/culture binary and is explicated through the images of gardens and forests. In this way, the Divakaruni’s narrative takes forward the intertwining of ecological concerns with feminism in retellings of epics such as Pratibha Ray’s *Yagnaseni* (1984) and Devdutt Pattanaik’s *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of Ramayana* (2013).

### Gardens and Gendered Culturing

Garden spaces and the act of gardening offer important perspectives on the ideas of taming and culturing. Raymond Williams points to how the word “culture” has its roots in the idea of tending of natural growth and how this idea of culturing later extended to the regulation of behavior and propriety (Williams 49). Historical links between civilization and gardening go back to the settling of nomads who “made gardens to symbolize the abstract ideas, which, as gifts from the gods, made civilization possible” (Turner, *Asian Gardens* viii). This idea of tending and culturing also extends to gendered power play where the male figure in the form of the husbandman exerts his control over the cultivation of land seen as female. In the pastoral mode of writing, the domestic space of the garden is often equated with cornucopian femininity where “depicted as a garden, a rural landscape, or a peaceful fertile scene, nature was a calm, kindly female giving of her bounty” (Merchant 7). The word “garden” derives from the Old English word “geard” meaning “fence” (Turner, *Garden History* 1) and the gendered connotation of the garden space also derives from such implications of enclosure and boundaries.

In *The Forest of Enchantments*, Divakaruni carefully situates Sita in the gardens and domesticated spaces to show how such spaces have been used to define acceptable and desirable femininity. The circumstances of Sita’s discovery in the field by king Janaka, or even her name Sita, meaning “furrow” link her to domesticated land. The novel opens with Sita amidst the royal garden in Mithila where she helps with the planting of flowers. Her keen understanding of the plant world makes her appear to people as healer and the “earth goddess” (5). In Ayodhya, Sita has a garden which takes care of her impulses for the wild outdoors. Ashok Vatika, the royal orchard in Lanka, houses both Sita from the other end of the sub-continent and exotic species of plants to “from as far away as the Himalayas, or from Kusadvipa, which lay on the other side of the earth” (196) and represents attempts to contain both women and flora. Panchabati and its garden bounds present another domestic space within the forest where nature is described as showing “her kind and bounteous face” (137) and where even the wild animals seem demure. When the brothers venture into the forest, they clear out and domesticate some of the forest land including its fauna to create a habitable space in Panchabati. While the men take turns to gather fruits and game, Sita stays back in Panchabati tending her garden. The Lakshman rekha right outside the garden space

of Panchabati separates the domestic space of the household and gardens from the wilderness outside. This points to another instance of creation of boundaries by man to contain a woman, and any transgression is forbidden.

### **Forests and the Gendered Conquest of the Unknown**

If gardens represent culture and civilization of the domestic space, the forests represent “an archetypal site of dread in the collective imagination” (Parker 1). The word “forest” has its roots in the word “foresta” which means “outside” (Harrison 201) and accounts for the forests existing in the margins of the city and outside of human civilization. In the Indian epics, the forests are perceived as the abode of non-human creatures like *rakshasas* which signify chaos (Parkhill 13). The epics of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* consist of entire books like the Aranya Kand and the Vana Parva respectively, dedicated to the characters’ sojourn in the forest. In these epics, the hero is seen as the civilizing force which will restore order through the subjugation of the wilderness. The burning down of the forest of Khandavprastha by the Pandavas to make way for the city of Indraprastha or the taming of the forest of Dandakaranya by Ram and Lakshman are described as acts of valour and the victory of good over evil forces. The forest and its dangers form a kind of test for the righteous king passing which he returns stronger, wiser and more virtuous to the city. Thus, Falk suggests that “the wilderness- or its beings- is an antagonist to be conquered before a kingship can be established” (Falk 2). Another kind of taming takes place in the forest when the sages and hermits retire to these wild places and build their *ashramas* which “lend a sacred atmosphere to the surrounding wilderness” (Parkhill 13). In either case, the forest becomes a decidedly a male space in the epics and serves the stage for the display of masculine virility in the domesticating of the wilderness.

In *The Forest of Enchantments*, the Dandakaranya forest becomes the site of human/non-human conflict wherein the humans residing in cities see it as the heart of darkness and take it upon themselves to bring light to the dark world. Sita and the other women are constantly warned against the dangers of the forest while the men are praised for fighting its demons who “knew strange enchantments, shooting arrows of fire or raining blood down their foes” (38). The city of Ayodhya, surrounded by Dandakaranya, is likely built through the aggressive clearing of the forests. This masculine aggression is first presented through the actions of the army of Ayodhya which unleashes itself on the forests “stomping and shouting, slashing back the undergrowth and lopping off branches and vines” (55) on both sides of the road to make way for the bridal contingent. When Ram hears of his exile, he thinks his journey to the forest has a purpose, that is, “to cleanse it of its dark forces” (124). In the forest, the sage Gautama appeals to Ram to save them from the atrocities of *rakshasas* who “want the entire forest to themselves” (132) and are posing a threat to the lives of hermits. Such a space of bestiality, Ram believes, is not suitable for the birth of princes and princesses who “must have a proper education so that they can fulfill their responsibilities as adults” (140). In gendered terms, such chaotic wilderness is equated with “the witch, symbol of violence of nature” (Merchant 127). A creature of the wild, Surpanakha with her unabashed sexuality traditionally represents a “disorderly woman” (Merchant 127) who “like chaotic nature, needed to be controlled” (Merchant 127). Thus, Lakshman severs off the nose and ears of the “monstrous” Surpanakha who “dares” to

propose to the princely brothers. Later, the two brothers fight off and kill the *rakshasa* group in the forest which comes to avenge Surpanakha and also destroy the *rakshasa* kingdom of Lanka in retaliation for Sita's abduction by its king, Ravana.

### Sita and the Post-Dualist Imaginary

Rashmi Luthra in her paper "Clearing Sacred Ground: Women Centered Interpretation of the Indian Epics" discusses how the cultural depictions of Sita have come a long way from a figure of suffering in the folk songs and Chandrabati's *Ramayana* and *In Search of Sita* to that of a figure of protest in Mallika Sengupta's "Sitayana" (Luthra 140-143). Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments* adds to this tradition by presenting through the figure of Sita an ecofeminist view of the epic. Here Sita problematizes clear cut distinctions between the domestic and wild nature and takes into task "dualisms and the ways in which feminizing nature or naturalizing or animalizing women has served as justification for the domination of women, animals and the earth" (Gaard 5). Divakaruni's Sita longs for the adventures of the forest world and wishes to exist like "the earth-mother the way she'd been before people bent her to their desires" (8). While she likes being in the garden, she soon finds its boundaries limiting. She is trained in the martial arts by "mysterious women from the hills" (9) who are suggested as living outside the bounds of domestic life. The forests which present a challenge to the male view of an ideal rational and ordered view of the world appear to Sita as her kin. She associates the forest life with freedom, one that she realizes she would never have in the palace. This way, she overturns the received images of Sita representing the passive Mother earth in the domesticated space of the garden.

While the acts of conquering forests, killing *Rakshasas* and waging wars appear to the epic men as necessary acts of taming and civilizing, to Sita they signify violence. In the novel, she is seen to protest any harsh treatment of the wild nature and the creatures therein. The aggressive clearing of the forests by the army of Dasharatha shocks Sita and she appeals to Ram to order the army to proceed gently. On hearing Ram's simplistic explanation of associating Sita's tender heartedness with femininity, Sita wonders whether "it is not as important for a king to feel the hurt of others as women did?" (56). In the figure of Sita, Divakaruni presents a world view which sees no difference between jungle rule and the rule of law. One can contrast the views of men who feel having every right to the forest and that of Sita who sees the humans as "visitors to the forest, which had its own rules, its own rhythm, its own savage beauty" (151) which "belonged more to the *rakshasas* than to us" (151). While Surpanakha appears to Ram and Lakshman a *rakshasa* who "can't be treated with human courtesy" (150), to Sita she was "just an infatuated girl" (150) who did not deserve mutilation. Sita sees the plants and trees in Ashoka Vatika as "innocent and beautiful" (187) and feels the trunks of the same "split apart in distress" (226) as the war in Lanka "had devolved from a righteous cause to a gleeful carnage" (226). Sita's observations also raise questions on the traditional readings of epics where female transgression is seen to bring havoc in the form of wars. For example, in *The Mahabharata*, Draupadi laughing at Duryodhana during the Rajsuyya Yagna is often seen as the trigger for the war, while in *The Ramayana*, Sita's transgressing the *Lakshman Rekha* is seen to cause the destruction and upheaval that follows. Divakaruni's novel points to how it is in fact the violation of

Surpanakha or in ecological terms the violation of wilderness by the culturing forces of man that has caused the war. While Surpanakha is seen as the foil to Sita (Luthra 145) by dint of the respective perceptions of wilderness and domesticity in popular imagination, we find both of them to be the victims of male attempts at taming feminine sexuality. Ram denies Sita a child and her unfulfilled sexuality is then sublimated to her unrelenting demand for the deer. Thus, it is implied that not feminine transgression but male attempts at civilizing often lead to social and ecological unrest.

In Sita's view of the world, Divakaruni presents to us images of the coming together of the wild and the domestic. This is first seen in her reordering of Dasharath's garden:

My favourite responsibility, the palace garden, was very different now from Dasharath's time, when everything had been planted in strict and tied to stakes so they stood attention. My garden flowed along gentle lines, the way nature intended it to. It surrounded the palace on all sides, and a brook wound its way through it, babbling merrily. The entire side of the grounds that lay behind the palace I'd made into a forest (303).

When Sita is again banished to the forest at the end, she accepts her plight and instead works towards a new way of living in the lap of nature, which the men had blatantly demonized. While Ram had thought the forest to be unworthy of princes, Sita visualizes the space as the cradle of holistic living whereby:

the boys would be raised like no other. their greatest teacher would be their mother. Their world would be that of the hermitage. Their playground would be the forest. because of this, their strengths would be unique. (328-329)

Divakaruni also stresses on how patriarchal rule in controlled domesticated spaces leads to the culture of conquering and civilizing while a feminine way of life in wilderness leads the children to be "kind to all around them, humans as well as animals" (332). Above all, in Sita's realization that she is at once "Sita, the forest dweller, Sita, the daughter of the earth" (352), we find a the effacing of boundaries between the healer and warrior, the wild and the domestic, the enchanting forest and the nurturing garden.

## Conclusion

Gardens and forests in the novel are carefully positioned to describe a male dominated world at work and seek to highlight how the idea of taming of wilderness is central to imposing order on both nature and women. The garden spaces in the novel associated with domestic life and civilization seek to tie down women like Sita to the gentler aspects of nature which associate her with fertility, bounty and motherhood - all of which stand for acceptable femininity. The forests, on the other hand, are seen as dangerous spaces inhabited by the demonic creatures which the men must fight and women avoid at all costs. The transgression of the domestic spatial boundaries is punished as in the case of the woman in the jungle like Surpanakha who is dehumanised and mutilated or in the case of Sita who crosses the *Lakshman rekha* around her Panchabati garden and goes through abduction, an ordeal by fire and banishment. Divakaruni harps on such stereotypes linking nature and gender to show how such dualisms go a long way in the masculinist project of domination. As opposed to this Manichean view of the world, the character of Sita proposes an alternative view of the synthesis of the wild and the domestic wherein: i) women see the

forest not as a dangerous space but as a space of freedom, ii) the wilderness might as well be incorporated into the garden while the forest space may offer suitable grounds for culturing and iii) the non-human others are not demonised but seen as co-existing with humans. Thus, in place of a masculinist narrative of conquest, civilizing and dualism, Divakaruni offers a feminist Sitayan of empathy, care and relationality.

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## Competing Spatial Imaginaries and Emergent Realities in Adiga's *Last Man in Tower*

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### *Abstract*

*The idea of Bombay extends beyond territoriality, to encompass an explosion of dreams and desires. It stands as a metaphor of inclusivity despite repeated demagogic and neo-capitalistic claimants. Conversely, the dual nature of space - ownership and imagination poses an apparent paradoxical question in the city - whose claims and dreams will be privileged? Bombay's place has been central to modernization project. Post the renaming of the city as Mumbai, its transition towards modernity is suspect to give rise to a neo-capitalist imagination privileging grand modern designs over old existing structures, in the case of redevelopment. The deeper significance of such imagination rationalizes the economics of opportunism and upward mobility over stable social relations. This rationalization extends to justify violence for the greater good and receives legal patronage since the ideology of modernity contains an overarching Foucauldian regime of truth. Last Man in Tower provides such deep insights along with the rise of a new class that affords moral bankruptcy over financial loss of opportunity. This article through Adiga's text Last Man in Tower studies competing spatial imaginaries and emergent realities of the city Bombay and Mumbai, during development and redevelopment of spaces.*

*Keywords: Bombay / Mumbai, modernity, violence, regime of truth, development and redevelopment*

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### **Introduction**

Cities are urban spaces that form a microcosm of various dreams and desires of people. Geographically and metaphorically, these built environments evoke ownership and imagination in the mind's eye. Through a critical reading, such spaces embody in literary texts, an intimate relationship between the material and the mental. Spaces can attract or repel, or produce hatred and combat, as Bachelard notes, yet unlike the latter that requires an impassioned examination, the former is studied at the intersection of intimacy and imagination (xxxvi). The study on urban spatial imagination therefore becomes relevant, since themes in urban fiction, are "going to come as much from addresses in London, Birmingham, Yorkshire, as from Delhi or Bombay" (Shahani 1252). Hence, in Indian writing in English, cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore, Calcutta, etc. are globally re-imagined as literary sites to explicate urban narratives and imaginaries. The soft city" (Raban), here, that is Mumbai (earlier Bombay), evokes and imbricates urban imaginaries closely intertwined with the real city. Mumbai's relevance, however, extends beyond aesthetic to the economic, and quite similar to other cities, it is envisioned as an engine towards modernity. The value of real estate and economic planning forms central to the vision of the city, if looked from the national perspective. Grand visions and designs are

shaped to develop and re-develop the city. The dreamers of the city involve - the political administration, the planners and builders, and the people. Most cities retain their basic built environments to carry the essence of aesthetic imagination. The conflict arises when the vision of the planners competes with the imagination of the people. Thus, the question appears – who will seek primacy – the planners who blueprint the city or the people living in them. This paper studies the conflict in the idea of Bombay and Mumbai foregrounded by Arvind Adiga’s text *Last Man in Tower*.

### **About the novel**

*Last Man in Tower* is a fictional story set between March 2007 to October 2009 about residents in Vishram Society in Vakola (a region in Mumbai – India), who receive an offer from a builder to vacate flats, and make way for a luxurious high-rise construction. All residents eventually agree, except a school teacher – Yogesh Murthy a.k.a Masterji. The residents grapple between the powerful builder and the stubborn Masterji. The plot ends exposing the true face of human psyche when modernity’s narrative corrupts the aspirational middleclass residents with material temptations resulting in violence and murder – a quintessential Tolstoy-ian ending.

### **Vishram society – metaphor of Bombay**

The book *Last Man in Tower* characterizes Vishram Society with an introduction that is eponymous for its Sanskritic synonym “rest”. It encapsulates the metaphor for post-independence Bombay, primarily because the plaque unveiled by the Defence Minister in 1959 on the Prime Minister’s birthday read – “VISHRAM SOCIETY SHOULD SERVE AS AN EXAMPLE OF ‘GOOD HOUSING FOR GOOD INDIANS’” (Adiga 4). The gentrified Vishram stands as a microcosm of Bombay, an abode for Roman Catholics, Hindus and the better kind of Muslims. Vishram therefore symbolized a Bombay in which exclusion was hierarchically imbricated in its urbanizing process, while its architecture was designed to satisfy the idea of housing for “good Indians”, which was part of the national leaders and planners’ imaginary – an apparent display of colonial hangover. The stratification of citizenry in the gentrified building was for the “haves” and was embossed with the sign of *pucca* housing over the *kutcha* slumy Vakola (situated in Santacruz, Mumbai).

Vishram was conceived as a built environment, a space - “good housing” for normalizing an identity - “good Indians” to privilege their presence as an ideal place to feel at home - “rest.” Vishram once a gentrified space imagined to be the abode of “good Indians” for Bombay now looks old and outdated. The tall “middle class” respectable structure consisting of towers A & B turned “grandmotherly” (Adiga 4) due to three major problems: lack of 24-hour water supply, noise pollution from Santacruz airport and perennial nature of emergency repairs. While the first two problems appear a farfetched demand of the middle class considering the space and resource crunch in the heart of Bombay; the last one signifies that the process of modernity in the society has come to an end and it has started its journey towards decaying. Apparently, most of the inhabitants appear aspirational in the gated community and envy their neighbors. Vishram is in “work in progress” mode, not towards development but for repair and maintenance. Ironically, the residents are restless

because the slummy Vakola landscape calls for creative destruction to develop into something better.

While Vishram continued to rest and lose relevance, Vakola saw construction development in full swing, converting the place and capital as restless. The society now stood witnessing many speculative investments taking shape around the region, one of which rivalled the local builder – Dharmen Shah, i.e., the Ultimex Group. In between the equation of rest-laden Vishram residents and restless neocapitalist builders stood BMC – signifying neither rest nor restless but a suspended work in progress. Ibrahim Kudwa, a Vishram resident, vented his frustration by cheekily scribbling a Work in Progress board outside the society as:

INCONVENIENCE IN PROGRESS  
WORK IS REGRETTED  
BMC (Adiga 33)

The humorous re-writing suggests the frustration of middle class for the retarded construction of the local municipality BMC (Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation). Vishram residents feel frustrated because the BMC suspended its vicinity in a limbo – neither developed nor underdeveloped but in a perpetual state of confusion.

Vishram like Bombay stood for an old order neglected by its administrators; built on exclusionary foundations yet was a container of its residents' lived histories and memories. Gaston Bachelard conceives a house as a group of habits and a shelter of imagination, in which it becomes a container of dreaming and it is used for dreaming (Bachelard 08). Vishram as a building, evokes memories of intimate relation with the inhabitants, as in the case of Masterji who “[ ] placed his hand on the warm building. Just as when a drop of formaldehyde falls on dead leaf in a science class, revealing a secret life of veins, Vishram throbbed with occult networks. It was pregnant with his past” (Adiga 164). He re-lives his past – “I have memories here, Mrs. Puri. My late daughter, my late wife” (185). Vishram had produced meanings during the forty-four years of Masterji's life but the residents related to it in a different way, as in the case of Mrs. Puri, who viewed Vishram in comparison to Vakola landscape, after hearing about the real estate fortunes of the land – “Wouldn't it be nice if someone gave *us* 81 lakh rupees?”. Hence, unlike the old Masterji intimately imagining a Vishram-ful Bombay, his neighbors feel a restless desire for awaiting to capitalize on a modern Mumbai.

### **Modernity's regime of truth**

One defining feature in the text is the self-justifying ideology of modernity that appears a Foucauldian regime of truth. Paul Rabinow asserts that the Foucauldian regime of truth is not merely ideological or superstructural; it was a condition of the formation and development of capitalism” (Rabinow 80-81). In Adiga's text, the Foucauldian regime of truth is the agential capacity of the capitalist to make truth malleable for distortion to suit vested interest. Masterji had to face this distortion when he failed to receive protection from the agencies of justice and civil society against Shah's threat and criminal intimidation. His own lawyer - Parekh known as “Legal Hawk with Soul & Conscience” turned hostile:

Fundamentally speaking, sir, neither you nor any member of any registered co-operative housing society anywhere in this state is the proprietor, strictly

speaking of his or her flat. Your Society is the sovereign of your flat. You own a share certificate in that Society. If the Society decides to sell your flat, you have no right to dissent. (Adiga 283)

With this, the city imagined by Masterji and its values withered away. The narrative of capitalism infected Mr. Parekh and all malleable souls, while Masterji despite being uninfected remained affected by its dangers.

Unlike Masterji, all who knew him welcomed the capitalist discourse of modernity believing its grand imaginaries with surprise-ridden adjectives, expediting a yearning for its embracement; whereas the same discourse articulated a dislike for those failing to embrace modernity's grand imaginary by objectifying, infantilizing, ignoring or dehumanizing the subject. Capitalist modernity conditions dominant preferences among the privileged and political class, to form, acceptable conduct and visible appearance in urban spaces, for classifying nuisance, as Ghertner argues, "The ability to criminalise, punish and expel populations (of the poor, informal, migrant, etc.) that do not conform to the aesthetic norms of Indian cities – i.e., those that look like nuisances – hence presents a new or at least newly significant, arena for urban struggle in the post-colonial Indian city" (24). Reeling under the fear of being expelled, are the underprivileged slum dwellers, in the proximity of Vishram, as Mary, the khachada-wali, confesses to Masterji, "They're trying to throw me out of my home too. I live by the *nullah*" (Adiga 291). Poignantly, both the slum dwellers and Masterji, are viewed as "nuisance" to the aesthetics and acceptable conduct of capitalist modernity's grand imaginary.

Unlike, the slum dwellers, Masterji, was fated to be punished for being "unacceptable". Modernity's regime of truth through its narrative dehumanized Masterji, then systematically assassinated his character. The soldiers of modernity – Vishram residents killed him, while all agencies eventually dissociated any pathos in his murder. Even the newspaper that covered the story - *Mumbai Sun*' headlines read – "Suicide in Santacruz (East)?" which interestingly ended in a question mark; however, a clinical psychiatrist at Bandra Lilavati Hospital, claimed to have diagnosed Masterji for "mental deterioration" (Adiga 395), putting all rumors to rest. The peculiar grammar of regime of truth in Adiga's text danced to the tune of neocapitalist modernity, wherein professionals and neighbors abandoned moral conduct and colluded singularly for the economics of opportunism and upward mobility over stable social relations.

### **Idea of a new Mumbai**

Adiga's text juxtaposes the fall of Bombay's Vishram with the rise of a bold Mumbai hinged by builders like Dharmen Shah and J.J. Chacko. He caricatures them as demigods of neocapitalist modernity capable of deciding the fate of others. In the text, both Dharmen Shah from Confident Group and J. J. Chacko from Ultimex Group are known to materialize their vision to make Vakola an upmarket locality by investing in the best materials from the world to create a global architecture, recreating the local space as global. J. J. Chacko's vision is to get an "architect from Hong Kong, the noted land of modernism" (Adiga 53) to build an all-facilities inclusive gated community enjoying the luxuries of park, shopping mall, hotels, plazas and happy families.

One remarkable feature in this text is the reaction of Indian aspirational class comparing Indian modernity with China, portrayed similarly in Adiga's earlier text *The White Tiger*, signifying Indian exclusionary modernity going the China way. Both Chacko and Shah, confidently plan to materialize their visions using people as props for their built environment, which interestingly, as Perera observes, builders do through naming, image-making, satisfaction and production of envy. In a peculiar biographical vein, Jeet Thayil's *Narcopolis*, similarly describes the new India's aspirational class that fails to appreciate the attachment and imagination of the previous generation, which can be best expressed in Hansen's words, "The city was marked by an intrinsic restlessness and modernity, a place where older affiliations and loyalties were swamped and subsumed by the all-pervasive logic of money and business" (39).

These builders indulge in grand illusions of a Generator, Organizer and Destroyer (GOD) syndrome, and through their money and muscle ally "with politicians, policemen, and thugs to bribe and bounce people out of their homes" (Adiga 88). The strategy of these builder / developers is to artificially "generate" or create real estate value through speculative capital investment by identifying spaces near lucrative markets. Then they "organise" their formal and informal apparatus to buy or empty humans from these spaces to plan for the next stage of creative "destruction" which now becomes a process for redeveloping, re-creating the already built environment. They control the imaginary of modernity and the fate of anti-modern structures.

Vishram in relation to its *katcha* neighbourhood looked modern, while in relation to the new high-rising apartments, especially Ultimex standards - *katcha* or lesser modern. No wonder the neocapitalist greedy eyes of builder Dharmen Shah fell on the "rest"ing society to reimagine it as *pucca*. Adiga paints the landscape of an underdeveloped Bombay through a birds-eye "From the thirteenth floor, a window answers: banyan, maidan, stone, tile, tower, dome, sea, hawk, *amaltas* in bloom, smog on the horizon, gothic phantasmagoria (Victoria Terminus and Municipal Building) emerging from the smog" (Adiga 51). Shah's panopticon-like gaze surveys the city to reimagine - What is Bombay? from his ivory tower, too high to touch the sky and rise above the deplorable shanties in the neighbourhood. Vishram now becomes part of Shah's vision of modernity - 'Confident Shanghai,' a superimposing palimpsestic architecture rivalling Ultimex Group project in Vakola. Such palimpsestic blueprints have been criticized by Suketu Mehta (writers), Dwivedi and Mehrotra (architects) for its naked display of greed and superficial imaginations. Hence, the Vishram of Bombay is premodern and the builders plan to change the landscape into a restless modern Shanghai-like Mumbai.

Vishram Society, developed to house and rest "good Indians" of Bombay, comprise an aspirational middleclass community. Dharmen Shah unsettled the resting community by offering them a deal. While earlier, Mrs. Rego, Mrs. Puri, the Pintos, Mr. Kudwa and Masterji stood for Vishram, later each of them except Masterji turned opportunistic to Mr. Shah's offer and collectively slapped a spatial "Expulsion of [Masterji] from Society" (Adiga 273). While Masterji stood for stable relations with Vishram and Bombay, the other Vishram residents eventually rationalized temporary loyalties through the economics of opportunism and higher mobility in a "Confident Shanghai" Mumbai. Adiga's text ironically exposes the violent capacity of "good Indians" when they subvert democratic values by indulging in gossip, narrow-minded greed, jealousy along with harbouring harmful

intentions. In fact, staircases became a Parliament for Vishram residents' political plots to 'boycott Masterji' in the name of Gandhi and Nehru (211) and notice boards became a tool to unleash anonymous negative propaganda against 'a certain person' (215). Adiga's depiction of the imagined community of Vishram and Bombay portrays a restless unity of the aspirational middleclass.

The twist in the tale was the middleclass Vishram residents who stole-a-march over Dharmen Shah. The greed in the grand visions of modernity blinded the residents to commit any act to realize their ends. Vishram residents, in a desperate act, hammered Masterji to death and pushed him off the terrace to make it look like suicide. This shocked the builder "*They made this thing happen. Not to get my Shanghai built. To get their city built. They have used me for their ends*" (Adiga 406). Adiga's text exposes the brutal act of Vishram residents emerging as a new discourse of modernity. Intriguingly, the residents implicated Shah in their violent act to share the collective guilt. Shah's intervention simply made it win-win as he scribbled in his diary a requirement of materials for the building and a new "left hand man" perhaps anticipating the growing breed of modernity's "left hand" greedy followers.

In conclusion, the *Last Man in Tower* symbolically stands as a myopic attempt of the planners to develop and redevelop the city that is inorganic and exclusionary in nature. Arguably, this text appears Adiga's ode to Masterji and Bombay, sacrificed to lay the foundations of a new Mumbai, metaphoric for material greed and opportunistic motives germinating from the narratives of neocapitalist modernity. With the grim defeat of the "last man's" spatial imagination by the neocapitalist planner's vision, Adiga offers a cue to the readers to introspect and self-examine the modernity of our times.

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## **Class Conflict and Individual Success: Two Indias in Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger***

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### *Abstract*

*The White Tiger (2008) by Arvind Adiga explores the role of the complex network of State, politics, religion and capitalism in justifying and perpetuating the economic exploitation and the existing class structure in India. The novel presents the juxtaposition of 'two Indias' within one, for the rich and the poor respectively, and satirically points out the role of ideology in naturalizing this overwhelming inequality. The possibility of revolution in the present social structure is examined and the Marxist belief in the inevitability of the transition from capitalism to socialism, and ultimately communism, through class conflict is questioned. As a whole, a bleak picture of the rise of an individual by superseding the interest of his class (i.e. the proletariat) in the present capitalist society is presented in this novel.*

*Keywords: Class, Individual, Inequality, Marginalization, Hegemony, Ideological*

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The term 'class', an indispensable element in any discussion on social hierarchy and exploitation, is also a very loaded and controversial term and the political orientations of both the author and the reader invest the seemingly innocuous word with different meanings. Originally the word is derived from the Latin word *classis*, a term used by the Roman census-takers to categorize citizens according to their wealth in order to determine their military obligation to the State: "... on the one end of their classification were the *assidui*, who might well be proud of their 100,000 *as*; on the other end were the *proletarii*, whose only 'property' consisted in their numerous offspring – *proles* – and who were outdone only by the *lumpenproletariat* of the *capite cenci*, those counted by their heads" (Dahrendorf 3). Such stratification of the population into statistical units was definitely based on unequal distribution of wealth, but it was also something more than that. The adjective *classicus*, applied to first-class artists and works of art and eventually related to the age itself, is also derived from the same root word and is used to refer to something high-rated, honourable or prestigious.

Thus, as evident from the etymology of the word, 'class' is an essential factor for determining a person's location in society according to his economic condition, but is also linked to his power, honour or status in that particular society. From the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, however, the connotation of the word became more and more wealth-oriented, and 'class' began to replace other means of social classification such as rank, estates or orders, heralding the advent of a capitalist society where wealth and income were going to be



primary indicators of a person's position in social hierarchy. This change was brought about by Industrial Revolution and its attendant cultural changes in Europe. The countries in the other parts of the world, including India, gradually followed the same capitalist trend under the influence of colonization and later globalization.

When we connect marginalization to classification of human beings on the basis of economic factors, this refers to the process of exclusion of a group of people from the labour market on the basis of certain discrimination. By denying them the right to work, or the opportunity to do all kinds of work, and thereby earn a respectable livelihood, society relegates and confines them to its margin. But such exclusion is also linked to other factors such as race, as in case of the Aborigines in Australia or the Blacks in the U.S. In India for ages the caste system endorsed by religion confined a large number of people to menial and ill-paid jobs generation after generation on the basis of their birth to some particular castes.

Exclusion from the economic mainstream and denial of social respectability give birth to powerlessness too in terms of a lack of voice in the affairs of the State. Lack of economic power means lack of political power and having less opportunity to meaningfully participate in the democratic and legislative processes. This process of making a group of people powerless renders them afraid even to talk about their oppression. When internalized, this fear becomes a part of the psyche of the oppressed, so that they take their exploitation in the current economic system and their subordination by the ruling class as natural and normal.

*The White Tiger* (2008) by Arvind Adiga explores the role of this complex nexus of State, politics, religion and capitalism in justifying and perpetuating the economic exploitation and the existing class structure in India. The possibility of revolution in the present social structure is examined and the Marxist belief in the inevitability of the transition from capitalism to socialism, and ultimately communism, is questioned. As a whole, the bleak picture of the rise of an individual by superseding the interest of his class (i.e. the *proletariat*) in the present capitalist society is presented in this novel.

In *The White Tiger* the theme of economic exploitation is dealt with by using the contrasted motifs of 'light' and 'darkness'. They represent the two Indias existing side by side – the India of the rich and the India of the poor. In the first live the powerful and the affluent – the few belonging to the class of the exploiters. In the second live the have-nots, the downtrodden, the exploited who comprise the majority of the population of this country. The first India thrives at the cost of the second. Besides small spots of 'light' there is large portion of the country that is immersed in 'darkness.'

The story of Munna alias Balaram, 'the white tiger' of this novel, is the story of an individual's long, arduous journey from 'darkness' to 'light'. 'Darkness' comprises mostly of the riverside villages in India, rich in natural resources but bereft of the light and advantages of the centre, the cities. Very interestingly, the author links economic marginalization to spatial marginalization – to the location of places by the side of the rivers in this country: "The ocean brings light to my country. Every place on the map of India near the ocean is well-off. But the river brings darkness to India – the black river" (Adiga 14). However, later in the novel we find the juxtaposition of 'light' and 'darkness' in the cities too. Coming to Delhi in search of 'light' Balaram finds that here also, amidst the glitter of the wealth and luxury, there are numerous dark spots in which people like him are struggling to survive.

The villages by the side of the dark river that the author mentioned here are not still free from the feudal exploitation of the landlords. When capitalism replaced landlordism (or the *zamindari* system) in India these feudal lords who had accumulated wealth for generations became capitalists and businessmen in the cities. But in the darkness of the villages, still far away from the light of modernity, they continued their lordship in the same way as in the old days. Balamram here speaks of four landlords who held sway over all the natural resources and the population in his native village, Laxmangarh. Each of them was called by the name of a particular rapacious animal according to the peculiarities of the appetite that had been detected in him or the part of the village each has chosen to dominate. The Stork owned the river, his brother the Wild Boar owned all the good agricultural land, the Raven owned the grazing ground, the Buffalo all the roads. After they had consumed everything and left the village exhausted by their exploitation, the villagers too were compelled to leave it in search of job and food outside. There was an exodus of people towards the cities where, they thought, they could find their subsistence. Thus a large number of villagers, mostly farmers, became manual labourers in the cities, showing the transition from feudal to capitalist mode of exploitation in present India:

Each year, all the men in the village waited in a big group outside the tea-shop. When the buses came, they got on – packing the inside, hanging from the railings, climbing on to the roofs – and went to Gaya; there they went to the station and rushed into the trains – packing the inside, hanging from the railings, climbing on to the roofs – and went to Delhi, Calcutta and Dhanbad to find work. (Adiga 26)

Most of them remained in the cities and merged into the proletariat there as cogs in the wheel of the capitalist mode of production. Balamram was himself a part of this exodus.

Marx in his *Manifesto of the Communist Party* speaks of this agglomeration of the population in the cities with incorporation of more and more villagers into the bourgeois mode of production:

The bourgeoisie has subjected the country to the rule of the towns. It has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared with the rural....

The bourgeoisie keeps more and more doing away with the scattered state of the population, of the means of production, and of property. It has agglomerated population, centralized the means of production, and has concentrated property in a few hands. The necessary consequence of this was political centralization. . . .

The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together (46-47)

This increasing productive force, the city-based proletariat with their common grievances against their masters, was expected to make the class struggle more and more polarized. They lived in the slums of these cities, worked in the factories with unwholesome working conditions, or as domestic labourers in the houses of the rich. But there were still many others who could not find jobs regularly or at all. These jobless and homeless people made the inequality even more glaring. In the modern capitalist society these people without any buying power are non-entities, relegated to the fringe of the economic system. Therefore, in the cities also we find two Indias existing side by side. Such is the case with the capital of the country too:

Thousands of people live on the sides of the road in Delhi. They have come from the Darkness too – you can tell by their thin bodies, filthy faces, by the animal-like way they live under the huge bridges and overpasses, making fires and washing and taking lice out of their hair while the cars roar past them. (Adiga 119-20)

Capitalism thrives in India by catering to the different kinds of needs of the rich and the poor. While the rich immerse themselves in luxury, the poor struggle for the basic amenities of life. But the consumerist philosophy of the modern globalized world leaves none untouched. The poor try to imitate the rich with their limited capacities. They cannot change their class, but the market principle changes their class consciousness. So instead of opposing the bourgeois consciousness, they imbibe a part of this consciousness in buying cheaper versions of the goods that the rich use. Therefore, we find the coexistence of two different markets in the cities – one for the rich, the other for the poor – dividing men according to their buying power, but leaving none outside its grasp:

Every big market in Delhi is two markets in one – there is always a smaller, grimier mirror image of the real market, tucked somewhere into a by-lane.

This is the market for the servants. I crossed over to this second PVR – a line of stinking restaurants, tea stalls, and giant frying pans where bread was toasted in oil. The men who work in the cinemas, and who sweep them clean, come here to eat. The beggars have their homes here. (Adiga 203-04)

Balaram, who gradually grows conscious through his experience in the city of this inequality and exploitation inherent in the system, goes to the book store instead of the market. The ambiance of the book store and the smell of old books electrify him; poetry haunts him with a deep feeling of beauty. It is said, he recollects later, by one of his favourite poets, Ghalib, that one who is haunted by beauty can never remain a slave. In poetry he finds encoded signs in favour of the poor who have been waging their class struggle against the rich for ages:

... the history of the world is the history of the ten-thousand-year war of brains between the rich and the poor. Each side is eternally trying to hoodwink the other side: and it has been this way since the start of time. The poor win a few battles ... but of course the rich have won the war for ten thousand years. That's why, one day, some wise men, out of compassion for the poor, left them signs and symbols in poems, which appear to be about roses and pretty girls and things like that, but when understood correctly spill out secrets that allow the poorest man on earth to conclude the ten-thousand-year-old-brain-war on terms favourable to himself. (Adiga 254)

Poetry thus acts as a counterbalance to the ideological apparatuses of the rich symbolized by the 'Rooster coop.'

'Rooster coop' is Adiga's term for hegemony or the intricate web of ideologies that keeps the marginalized in India within its clutches without any effort from them to go out:

The roosters in the coop smell the blood from above. They see the organs of their brothers lying around them. They know they're next. Yet they do not rebel. They do not try to get out of the coop.

.....  
Here in India we have no dictatorship. No secret police. That's because we have the coop.

... A handful of men in this country have trained the remaining 99.9 per cent – as strong, as talented, as intelligent in every way – to exist in perpetual servitude; a servitude so strong that you can put the key of his emancipation in a man's hands and he will throw it back at you with a curse. (Adiga 173, 175-76)

The 'Rooster coop' here stands for the ideologies and institutions including family, school, religion, political parties, police, government etc. that operate harmoniously to perpetuate the age-old system of domination and exploitation in various forms. They corrupt the most well-meaning human ideals like democracy and socialism too. The author here pokes fun at socialism through the character of the Great Socialist who had become corrupted long ago and changed his allegiance from the poor to the landlords and the capitalists to remain in power:

Some of the customers at the tea shop said the Great Socialist started off as a good man. He had come to clean things up, but the mud of Mother Ganga had sucked him in. Others said he was dirty from the start, but he had just fooled everyone and only now did we see him for what he was. Whatever the case was, no one seemed able to vote him out of power. He had ruled the Darkness winning election after election... (Adiga 97)

More ironically, we have here a landlord's party with the name 'All India Social Progressive Front (Leninist Faction)' with its slogan of 'Stand up to the rich!' (Adiga 99). There is also a detailed discussion in this novel about how elections are rigged in the Darkness and the poor are denied their voting rights and therefore any say in the government in this country.

The more Balaram grows conscious of such hypocrisy, inequality and exploitation all around, the more he becomes impatient of his servitude. But in order to shake off the servitude outside, one needs first to be free from the servitude inside. Balaram sees a buffalo carrying a cart full of carcasses of dead buffaloes on its own. There is no master with a whip to guide it; it just knows from habit where to go with this load of death. He sees in it the symbol of the poor drawing the dead bodies of their kith and kin without rebellion for ages. He realizes that if he rebels, his family will have to pay the price for it. However, Balaram's desire for freedom is far stronger than his love for his family. At other places in this novel family is shown as one of the ideological apparatuses through which the exploitative system maintains its tyranny. Balaram is not ready to sacrifice his freedom and well-being for it. In his ravings he makes this resolve clear and bids farewell to his family: 'I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I can't live the rest of my life in a cage, Granny. I'm so sorry' (278).

While driving on the streets of Delhi at night Balaram sees an apocalyptic vision of a class war brewing – a war of the poor against the rich:

*Speak to me of blood on the streets, I told Delhi.*

*I will, she said.*

I saw other men discussing and talking and reading in the night, alone or in clusters around the street lamps. By the dim lights of Delhi, I saw hundreds that night, under trees, shrines, intersections, on benches, squinting at newspapers, holy books, journals, Communist Party pamphlets. What were they reading about? What were they talking about?

But what else?

Of the end of the world.

*And if there is blood on these streets – I asked the city – do you promise that he will be the first to go – that man with the fat folds under his neck?*

A beggar sitting by the side of the road, a nearly naked man coated with grime and with wild unkempt hair in long coils like snakes, looked into my eyes:

*Promise.* (Adiga 220-21) [Emphases original]

So the novel examines the possibility of an intense class war with the inequality becoming more glaring every day. But does Balamram himself take part in this war? Can his robbing and killing his master be called a part of the revolution as he claims? At the end of the novel we find that despite all his invectives Balamram just becomes one of those whom he called his enemy once – a rich man totally immersed in corruption. He adjusts himself to the corrupt system without any difficulty or struggle. He only replaces his master with most of his vices and becomes a cog in the same wheel. He is no bringer of change in this sense; he just changes his class alliance. The price of his climbing the social ladder is paid by his family for whom he feels no concern at all. His revolt is thus only a selfish move for personal success. He is just a rooster that escapes the coop at the cost of others. At the end, after he becomes an ‘entrepreneur’ in his own terms, Balamram loses faith in the possibility of revolution too:

An Indian revolution?

No, sir. It won’t happen. People in this country are still waiting for the war of their freedom to come from somewhere else – from the jungles, from the mountains, from China, from Pakistan. That will never happen. Every man must make his own Benaras. (Adiga 304)

The author, it seems, even while following the logic of his fictional world, could not ignore the actual reality of present-day India where race for individual success has already superseded class consciousness in an all-encroaching capitalist culture.

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## **Re-creating Migrant Identity: Analysing Trauma in Deepak Unnikrishnan's *Temporary People***

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### *Abstract*

*Identity and the concept of 'home' are invariably linked to the discussions on migrant literature. The dislocation of migrants leaves them with a mangled perception of the concept of 'home' and their identity is constantly under threat. Trauma theory can be an effective tool to understand problematisation of migrant identity as portrayed in migrant literature. The present paper aims to analyse the re-creation of migrant identity in Deepak Unnikrishnan's novel Temporary People (2017) which maps the lives of migrants in the Gulf by applying propositions of Jeffrey Alexander's theory of cultural trauma and trauma process. As a debut novel, it was the inaugural winner of the Restless Books Prize for New Immigrant Writing. In a series of randomly narrated stories, the author re-creates the identity of migrants in the Gulf through various narrative techniques, especially magical realism. Each chapter in the novel displays the deliberate flouting of conventions in order to re-present the migrant's condition. The paper also explores how transnationalism is reflected in the novel and its relation to the trauma process.*

*Keywords: trauma theory, identity, migrant, home, magical realism, transnationalism*

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Migrant identity is a concept which cannot be overlooked when dealing with migrant literature. Writers of migrant fiction through the years have utilised different methods and approaches in presenting and re-presenting migrant identity. Another preoccupation of migrant fiction is the concept of trauma. The process of migration in itself is frequently referred to as traumatic. However, this approach has changed with the development of theoretical aspects of trauma. It is essential to study a work beyond the single aspect of trauma and focus more on its further implications by engaging with it using theory. The focus of this paper is on the social theory of cultural trauma and the definition of the trauma process as proposed by Jeffrey Alexander. It attempts an analysis of the trauma process in

Deepak Unnikrishnan's *Temporary People* and examines how it contributes to the re-creation of migrant identity.

Published in 2017, the novel presents a wide array of characters who are mostly Malayali immigrants in the Gulf. Unnikrishnan dabbles with form and experiments wildly with style in this novel. Karthik Shankar in his article on the writer describes him as a "global immigrant" owing to his migration to different countries at different stages of his life. As the title *Temporary People* suggests, the characters are temporary. None of them are fully developed in the novel. Unnikrishnan offers only a slice of their life. However, there is a carefully crafted connection in their common identity as 'temporary people'. Many of them remained unnamed. Most often they are identified by the kind of work they do in the foreign land as is suggested in the chapter titled "Pravasis." Their individual identity does not matter; collectively they become 'temporary people.'

*Temporary People* has many peculiarities which render it the status of a unique narrative. One of them is the long winding sentences. There is also a disregard for punctuation or grammatical structure in sentences. This manner of narrative gives the effect of ranting. For example, in the chapter titled "Gulf Return", we find a sentence like:

It didn't matter what they did, it wouldn't have mattered what they did, because the man leading the charge in an act of despair, opened his mouth wide to ask them all to get away get away, wide wide wider, until he swallowed the first person in his path, then the next, and the next, refusing to stop running as the little suitcase did the same, opening and closing itself, running into people, sucking people in like a sinkhole, aided by the passport jockey, who assisted by stuffing in those who fought desperately to escape (Unnikrishnan 6).

The writer captures the voices of many migrants through the different chapters in the novel. The polyphonic narration is brought out through the different characters in the novel. As each voice is important, there is a collectivity of voices, almost like cacophony. It is not possible to give a neat storyline as the chapters are presented as fragments. Each chapter is presented in a different style. The complicated structuring of the novel in fragments also contributes to the idea of the fragmented, complex identity of the migrants.

Magical realism which harps on the thin line between the real and the unreal is perhaps the most ideal narrative technique in migrant fiction. This becomes more evident in *Temporary People*. The tales in the novel that lie on the edge of fiction and reality are expressive of magical realism. Even at the very beginning of the novel, one can see the use of magical realism:

In a labor camp, somewhere in the Persian Gulf, a laborer swallowed his passport and turned into a passport. His roommate swallowed a suitcase and turned into a little suitcase...the third roommate privy and vital to the master plan ran away the next morning with the new suitcase and passport (Unnikrishnan 5).

The novel also presents other instances where magical realism is employed. In the chapter titled 'Sarama,' Muthassi calmly unscrews her head, twisting it off like a bottle cap and places it on her lap. Later she tells her great grandson to take her outside. The boy goes out carrying her head in his hand (Unnikrishnan 199). In two chapters similarly titled "Blatella Germanica," from different Books of the novel, there is a depiction of cockroaches that speak and dress like humans. Characters metamorphose into other forms at many instances

in the novel suggesting a constant re-creation of identity. This re-creation of identity is aided by magical realism.

The problematised identity of the migrants is presented by using a variety of narrative techniques. Use of monologues helps in further highlighting the issue of disintegrated migrant identity. Deepak Unnikrishnan also uses a mix of three languages; English, Arabic and Malayalam in the novel. Chapter is written as “Chabter” in the novel. Book numbers are written in the Arabic numeral. Malayalam words appear both in translation and in the original. This trilingual presentation is partly reflective of the writer’s own trilingual identity and that of the other Malayalee migrants like him. The expatriates are referred to as *pravasi* throughout the novel. There are also a number of ‘nativisms’ in use like “Kada” for ‘shop,’ “Kadakkaran” for ‘shopkeeper’ and “Kadha” for ‘story’ (Unnikrishnan 191). In many instances, he writes the spelling of English words as a Malayali would pronounce them. For instance, ‘phone’ is written as “fone” (Unnikrishnan 25) and ‘country’ as “cundry” (Unnikrishnan 191). Peggy Levitt’s observations on the immigrant experience could provide an explanation for the use of mixture of languages. She remarks: “The immigrant experience is not a linear, irreversible journey from one membership to another. Rather, migrants pivot back and forth between sending, receiving and other orientations at different stages of their lives” (41). This is also an instance of transnationalism reflecting in the novel. Transnationalism is characterized by fluidity in identity. The migrant is no longer sure of where he/she belongs or what he/she is.

The author also employs the literary device of repetition throughout the text. For example in the chapter titled “Nalinakshi” we read:

Pravasi means foreigner, outsider. Immigrant, worker. Pravasi means you’ve left your native place. Pravasi means you’ll have regrets. You’ll want money, then more money. You will want one house with European shitters. And one car, one scooter. Pravasi means you’ve left you loved ones because you’re young, ambitious, filled with confidence that you’ll be back some day, and you probably will (Unnikrishnan 185).

In the given example, the repetition of the word “*pravasi*” is for emphasis. It also lends to the colloquial mode of narration. The use of repetition in the novel at different places is significant with regard to the theme that is represented in it. Each migrant has in common the pain of always being an outsider, in both the native land and the foreign land. Repetition also becomes important because migration is like a never - ending cycle. When one person is dead or leaves the country/ he she is replaced by another. Repetition is also connected to trauma theory as it describes continuous identity creation and recreation as will be discussed in the next section of the paper.

Jeffrey Alexander details three stages of the trauma process, namely Identity Revision, Memory and Routinization. Reconstruction of the collective identity “means that there will be a searching re-remembering of the collective past, for memory is not only social and fluid but also deeply connected to the contemporary sense of the self.” Identities are continuously constructed and secured not only by facing the present and future but also by reconstructing the collectivity’s earlier life” (26). The first stage of the trauma process, “Identity Revision” can be seen in the following ways in the novel. The chapter titled “Birds” shows immigrant construction workers who are taped by immigrant nurse Anna Varghese (Unnikrishnan 9). The fact that the immigrants are taped, points to their



fragmented disintegrated identities. The author himself seems to be taping immigrants in the Gulf through his narration in the novel. A character presented in chapter six of the final Book of the novel, Gulf Mukundan tells his son, “Look at me! Some of me - elsewhere” (Unnikrishnan 231). Interestingly, the title of this chapter has been blackened out. The metaphor of disintegrating and dismembered body parts is used frequently in the novel. The author himself becomes the character in the chapter titled “Baith,” where he is a son returning to meet his dying father. At the airport, following an unfortunate turn of events, he is dismantled. He says, “So I am dismantled. My brain pulled out, my blood poured into buckets, my limbs put in a tub alongside my organs. My skin is the hung on a coatrack and my bones collected in trashbags” (Unnikrishnan 247). This fragmented self is a reflection of the writer’s own blurred identity as well as that of the collectivity of migrants. Unnikrishnan’s dedication in the novel has a notable line in this regard, “For us inventors of realms/identities, manglers of language(s).”

With regard to the second stage of the trauma process, one can see that there are constant reminiscences of ‘home’ by the migrant. One of the Books in the novel is notably titled, “Veed” meaning ‘home.’ In the chapter titled, “Taxi Man” (Unnikrishnan 29) a Pakistani taxi driver through his monologue reiterates that the purpose of his existence in the city is to provide for his family at home. The migrant is always reminded of “home.” In the novel, Gulf Mukundan on his return talks about the immigrant, “You learn to cope. Longing for the homeland is what marks you out to be a Gulf-party man” (Unnikrishnan 222). When the new identity of the migrant is created and recreated the past memories are also significant. The migrant who returns back to his native place has dispersed memories. These fragmented memories are also necessary for the recreation of identity.

Nicholas Van Hear refers to M. Weiner who saw “labour migrations as ‘incipient diasporas’ and noted ‘the illusion of impermanence’ of ‘temporary labour migrants’”. He also quotes a familiar saying: “Nothing is so permanent as a temporary worker” (34). This is clearly evident in the case of the “pravasi”. Pravasi, the Malayalam equivalent of the word ‘expatriate’ is frequently used in the novel. In the chapter titled ‘Nalinakshi’, through a monologue Nalinakshi decodes the meaning of the word ‘pravasi’. After a list of other connotations of the word, she ends by saying that it always means “absence” (Unnikrishnan 186). In a chapter titled “Pravasis”, a list of words that are associated with the word are mentioned again, notably, “Non-resident”, “Non-citizens”, “Illegal” and “Ephemeral” (Unnikrishnan 24). The idea is that that the word sums up to nothingness. They are people who deny their own existence or are denied of their existence. The meanings attributed to ‘pravasi’ suggest that their identity is defined by their absence. In this regard, there are three chapters with a similar title but with minor variations. In Book 1, the chapter is titled “Pravasis,.. in Book Two, it is “Pravasis?” and in Book Three it is “Pravasis.” The pravasis are part of a cycle as is evident from the phrases, “Deported.Left./More. Arriving”(Unnikrishnan 24). The services rendered by the pravasi or the duration of his/her stay in the Gulf country do not count. He/She is just another individual who is bound to carry his/her home in a suitcase. The pravasis carry their home. The pravasi can never be a citizen. Vasudevan who has to leave with his wife Devi because of the rule of mandatory retirement become a true picture of pravasi identity. It is said of them in the chapter that is presented in the form of a newspaper report that, “They smell like their apartment. Their apartment smells like them”(Unnikrishnan 86). The pravasi and his/her connection with space are important.

The space he occupies defines his identity. In the case of this novel, the pravasi is portrayed as one without a definite space. His/her space is defined by the suitcase in his/her hand. The pravasi's home becomes a suitcase and the suitcase becomes the pravasi's home.

The trauma process is complete and "Routinization" takes place as shown in the concluding chapter where the migrant identity is established. The title of the chapter, notably is "Pravasis=" As the author experiments wildly throughout the text, the final chapter is no exception. For instead of words, the chapter has two pages of figures. Their faces are indistinguishable except for the fact that they all have a suitcase. This relates the figures to that of the man in the first chapter. This man swallows everything in his way at the airport until "the man was not recognizable anymore" (Unnikrishnan 7). In the second page of the final chapter, there are magnified images which are still in a blur but are darkened. The only commonality that they share is their unclear identity, suitcase and the fact that they are all facing the same direction. The title of the novel is made clear in this chapter using this array of almost identical figures. The presence of the suitcase as a certainty, suggests that they are temporary people. It is interesting to note that the figures are depicted as walking out of the book, meaning that they were not meant to stay. It can be said that through the writing of this novel Unnikrishnan engages in what Alexander calls as "memorialization or ritualization of the lesson learned from the social trauma" (30).

Summing up the trauma process Alexander says:

Intended to remember and commemorate the trauma process, efforts to institutionalize the lessons of trauma will eventually prove unable to evoke the strong emotions, the sentiments of betrayal and the affirmations of sacrality that once were so powerfully associated with it (27).

In the end the "reconstructed collective identity remains" (27). The reconstructed collective identity emerges in the novel through the creation of the novel by the writer. The migrant identity that emerges in the novel is one that cannot be confined to a particular framework, which is suggested by the figures shown as exiting the book. The concept of transnationalism in the novel becomes evident here in the creation of a fluid identity. The migrant identity will never be what it once was. It becomes a blend of the land in which he/she stays as a migrant. In a sense, it is an acceptance of the changed identity, which again would continue to change. The trauma process does not end for the migrant, it goes on.

Deepak Unnikrishnan's bold experimentation with form and genre help him to portray the migrant identity in all possible ways. The use of different narrative techniques and literary devices also helps to convey the temporality of the life and identity of the immigrants. The trauma process is clearly delineated in the novel and the migrant identity is recreated. The identity created in the end as part of the trauma process, is that of an individual who cannot be clearly defined. *Temporary People* provides a fresh look into the present issues with regard to Gulf immigrants by its presentation of an unconventional mode of writing. Most notably, the technique of magic realism used contributes well when interpreting the novel using trauma theory. The novel's unique style lends itself to numerous interpretations. Analysing the novel using cultural trauma theory and tracing the trauma process within it has provided a new paradigm for interpreting the novel.

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## Stagnant Development in Indian Child Widow Narratives: A Psychoanalytical Approach to Bapsi Sidhwa's *Water: A Novel*

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### *Abstract*

*Parents and filial environment play a substantial role in securing a fundamental base of a child's life. Water: A Novel (2006) by Bapsi Sidhwa observes this base being ripped apart when a child widow is repositioned to a widow ashram (house for widows). The article traces the changes in this life-changing event of becoming a child widow by using Attachment theory as the evaluating factor. This includes Separation Anxiety developed by children when separated from their caregivers. John Bowlby theorised child's emotional bond with primary caregiver as significant in his/her development and emotional regulation. This analysis reveals the forced trauma and the social exclusion faced by girl child due to widowhood.*

*Keywords: Attachment Theory, Reclusion, Separation Anxiety, Water, Widow narratives, Bapsi Sidhwa.*

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### **Introduction**

The interwoven progression of culture and religion throughout Indian cultural history has influenced the social and psychological aspects of human life. This influence is represented through *Water: A Novel* by Bapsi Sidhwa through the widowhood of an eight-year-old widow, Chuyia, living in an ashram (house for widows) with other older widows. The novel was borne out of Deepa Mehta's screenplay of the movie *Water* (2005). It is an apt representation of pre-independent India's cultural and social norms which defined the life of widowed women. The narrative touches upon child widowhood, extreme social exclusion of widows, and prostitution of the same.

Psychoanalysis as a critiquing method has expanded through psychological and literary theoretical proponents. Psychological theoretical aspects have been brought forth through rigorous experimental procedures, one of which is Developmental psychology. This has expanded psychoanalysis as child development examines the formulation of personality. The relationship between a child and primary caregiver defines Attachment theory by analysing child's dependency on their parents. The separation between the two brings drastic

changes in developmental stages of the child. The ancient Indian cultural and religious beliefs created the normalisation of child marriages and widowhood. Both of which results in separation from primary caregiver during their development when their cognition may not be fully equipped to handle the world without adult supervision (Ainsworth and Bowlby 334).

Child Marriage and subsequent widowhood remains a shadowed mark in Indian cultural history where the religious facets have governed the social and psychological aspects of human life defining their socially constructed gender roles. The position of daughters and women has been subjugated due to misguided interpretations of *Dharma-Shastras*, who initially permitted widow re-marriage, and Smriti literature, especially *Manusmriti* which defined the physical, social, and psychological removal of widows from their previously married life. This was further imposed on child brides as well after 1100 A.D. (Altekar 183).

This regime is embodied through the literature of 18th -19th century where women novelists presented the plight and sufferings of women in patriarchal Bengali society. Some of these novels written in Bangla are Swarnakumari Debi's *Snehalata Ba Lalita* (1892-1893), Kusumkumari Roychoudhurani's *Snehalata* (1890) and *Premlata* (1892) and many others to bring forth reality of widowhood. Many authors portrayed the dire socio-economic status of widows' lives like Rabindranath Tagore's *Chokher Bali* (1903), Sarat Chattopadhyay's *Charitraheen* (1917) and *Shesh Prashna* (1931). The narratives created in contemporary literature and media also portray similar state of widows. One of which is the documentary-*The Forgotten Woman* by Dilip Mehta (2008) depicting marginalization of widows revolving around old customs and economic dependency resulting in their isolation from society. It provided the harsh realities of widows living in thousands of numbers in cities like Vrindavan and Varanasi. *The Forgotten Woman* and Deepa Mehta's *Water* (2005) brought forth the ugly picture of misery that clung to the lives of widows. David Burton (2013) explores the plight of women in Indian patriarchal family as represented by Deepa Mehta and Satyajit Ray in their films. He compares both filmmakers who highlighted the subservient nature of women in Indian society during different eras.

Bapsi Sidhwa, Kashmira Sheth and many other female writers have given face to subjugation of girl child in South Asian cultures in 21st century revealing their feminist stance and cultural hegemony practiced by upper class men defining cultural norms pertaining to their own hierarchical society. The representation through Indian cinema is clearly visible in films like *Prem Rog* (1982), *Dor* (2006), *Rudali* (1993), and *Swet Patharar Thala* (1992) where reflection of widowhood as a social issue through different time frames impact a larger audience (Jhimli 7). These representations reveal the hypocritical nature of the religious practices forced upon daughters and women. Through child characters, they portray the changing developmental trajectory of their life due to early marriage and widowhood.

## Research Gap

The portrayal of Hindu widows in the narrative of *Water* has brought forth numerous feminist analysis to highlight the oppressive patriarchal society. Muzafar Ahmad Pandith and Gulzar Ahmad Bhat's (2021) assessment of gender discrimination by using Judith Butler's concepts of male-female binary presents the gender divide in Indian society. Asma Amanat

and Ihtasham-ur-Rehman (2015) in their study explore femininity and sexuality to highlight the extent of female subjugation as portrayed in the novel. Stefano Mercanti (2011) uses Partnership model as proposed by Riane Eisler and shows structure of Indian society through dominator model while Tutun Mukherjee (2008) highlights the impact of dialectic imagery through Deepa Mehta's movie *Water* to showcase the plight of widows in Indian society in the form of artistic expression. The present paper tries to fill the research gap of psychological impact on girl child due to absence of primary caregiver and the impact it has on the emotional regulation of the child widow.

## Research Methodology

The study uses Psychoanalytical approach in context to child widowhood and the nuances of changing child's psyche due to separation from parents through the textual analysis of *Water* by Bapsi Sidhwa and Deepa Mehta as a primary source. It uses Attachment Theory by John Bowlby and the concept of Separation Anxiety to showcase the psychological trauma of being a child widow.

## Discussion and Analysis --Life as a Widow

Many socio-religious customs glorify the prosperity of married life and the role of women as bearer of sons. *Water: A Novel* by Bapsi Sidhwa depicts marriage and subsequent widowhood of eight-year-old Chuyia who is then abandoned at widow ashram as per directed by Brahmanical traditions. The religious scriptures also dictate the mobility, social standing as well as removal of symbols of individuality from a widows' life (Altekar 192). This becomes imperative to note that one of the harshest customs of widowhood is separation and exclusion from all social relationships which includes separation from parents as well. Cultural systems always bring variation to psychological trajectory of human development (Kakar 8). This trajectory is disrupted when responsibilities connected to marriage and widowhood are heavily imposed on women in a male-dominated society resulting in their oppression. This also leads to association of female as 'other' amidst heavily patriarchal cultural system which is mainly because "different norms have been set for both men and women, though they live in the same world yet different rules guide their lives" (Shekhawat 82)

As Simone de Beauvoir has emphasised the 'Otherness' of women through *The Second Sex* (1949), it is visible in *Water: A Novel* as well where Somnath reminds Bhagya of her subjugated place. The prevalent patriarchal notions seek to limit physical and psychological space of women. The position of women presents the need to recognise the position of daughters as well. As daughters, they are still at the age which is deemed as childhood bringing a whole new spectrum of cognition for the character. Chuyia's psychological underdeveloped stage is invisible where female subjugation is practised even before they fully identify their 'Otherness' or even attempt to change it. This is also recognised by Leela in *The Keeping Corner* (2007) where Kashmira Sheth presents the pre-defined role of daughter. Sidhwa expertly shows absence and silence of Bhagya as Chuyia is left at widow ashram. Being the primary caregiver of Chuyia, Bhagya has no power over her fate. Many behaviourists have deduced that primary relationships hold the most strength in

securing a child's emotional regulation. The abandonment of Chuyia by her parents disrupts the consistent regulation of her emotional space which further threatens her sense of safety.

Widowhood brings forth the hypocritical patriarchal notions to forefront when Chuyia innocently enquires about widowers. She did not categorise the gender roles which consequently questioned the socially accepted affective meaning of being a female in Indian society. This shows the stunted cognitive understanding of a child in these circumstances which in case of Chuyia is limited regarding the established social systems. Widowhood specifically followed beliefs that removed individuality of the widows including tonsuring the hair which symbolised removal of beauty and youthfulness for women (Altekar 188). Chuyia and Leela did not want to shave their heads, but they were forced to do so. Both girls did not understand the need for such rituals, but their protest was muted with unspoken orders. Even Noor from *The Last Color* (2018), by Vikas Khanna, longed for her life before she became a widow. When Choti presents her with a wig, she cannot help but put it on for one time to see how she would have looked if she still had her long hair.

The *ashrams* near the ghats of Ganga River display geographical seclusion for widows who are surrounded by religious purity symbolised through water but are unable to experience it for themselves because of the religious hypocrisy of subservience. Chuyia's physical incapability to leave her widowhood is also similar for other older widows who are prisoners of social exclusion in a city with geographical, cultural, and spiritual importance. The presence of funeral pyres around the river further enhances the cycle of life and death around Ganga whose religious purity embraces both (Srinivasan and Shekhawat 7).

### **Attachment as an integral factor affecting Child's Life**

“Attachment is where the child uses the primary caregiver as a secure base from which to explore and, when necessary, as a haven of safety and a source of comfort” (Benoit 541). One of the first schemas for a child is developed through security from parents and familial environment. It gives child cues to grow with a secure base. Every foundation is rendered upside down when this secure base is ripped away from a child's life. This process renders different reactions due to difference in formation of their emotional foundation. Due to young age, Chuyia's subconscious makes her more emotionally dependent. Even lack of emotional availability from her own parents does not hinder her attachment with her family. Leela understands the society and its customs more than Chuyia. Widowhood brings her into a reality of the suppression that she is forced to suffer due to her own family. Being a twelve-year-old makes Leela's cognitive abilities much higher than that of Chuyia, which is why, she understands that these customs need to be followed even if she does not want to. The social rules ingrained in her parents compels them to force Leela to sacrifice her joyous nature and to ‘keep corner’ for a year.

As a mother, Bhagya holds the position of primary caregiver in Chuyia's mind which is highlighted through Sidhwa's portrayal of the mother-daughter relationship. Bowlby's Attachment theory is heavily influenced by ethology, but also shows the ways new-borns establish attachment since infancy to their caregivers as proclaimed through “Bowlby claims that during the early years, while the child acquires the capacity for self-regulation, the mother is a child's ego and superego” (Bretherton 7).

By definition, a normally developing child will develop an attachment relationship with any caregiver who provides regular physical and/or emotional care, regardless of the quality of that care. In fact, children develop attachment relationships even with the most neglectful and abusive caregiver. (Benoit 543)

After the schematic formation of familial security, it is imperative that child develops further in a similar pace which includes cultural and social environment of the child and family. Their connection with their family grounds their emotional regulation. One of the reasons Indian culture has been successful in sustaining so long is because of the disciplinarian parenting technique which reinforced the already established socio-religious norms. This brings out the question of Indian Parenting style which has many peculiar qualities but one of the recurring ones is that of Authoritarian or Disciplinarian. The disciplinarian role of mother often includes physical punishment which is considered necessary in typical Indian households to create a mental barrier of fear in child. Chuyia's family followed the same. Bhagya could never see Chuyia beyond the daughter that needs to learn passive subjugation and often resorted to physical violence. Shakuntala calmly handled Chuyia even when her tantrums were unbearable. Her value in Shakuntala's life is much more than a child widow. She feels Chuyia needs more care than anyone and notices the different nuances of changes in Chuyia when she is faced with death. Her demeanour during Kalyani's funeral, as she is sitting beside Shakuntala on the steps of Ganga River, pushes her towards another separation from her friend who had become a part of her emotional foundation. Even though Shakuntala had made her secure in her new environment, the formation of a new internal model of emotional foundation is continuously changing due to Bua and Kalyani's deaths.

Bowlby's paper titled 'Separation Anxiety' brought parent-child relationship and its importance at the forefront. The primary schema formed in child's mind is heavily connected to mother. Anxiety is basically referred to combination of external threat and processes consisting of internal and instinctive thoughts which try to bind the internal foundation when faced with adverse situations (Bowlby 93). The parent-child attachment and separation anxiety form the traumatic schemata when that attachment is broken. Chuyia experiences similar detachment from her mother. With formation of caregiving cycle, the child rarely suspects any change to the foundation of their secure development. But there could be many hurdles which could threaten the foundation from which child is thriving and one of which is separation from their family, or more specifically parents. This separation could alter their caregiving cycle and force a child to suffer through separation anxiety. Chuyia is anxious to return to her family after being abandoned at the ashram. The erratic behaviour of Chuyia is a sign of disturbance in her internal emotional regulation. It affected the foundation of Chuyia's mental schemata which connects familial aspects together.

Robertson had identified three phases of separation response: protest (related to separation anxiety), despair (related to grief and mourning), and denial or detachment (related to defence mechanisms, especially repression). Again, drawing on ethological concepts regarding the control of behavior, Bowlby maintained that infants and children experience separation anxiety when a situation activates both escape and attachment behavior but an attachment figure is not available (Bretherton 11).

Chuyia violently protests her abandonment at ashram by creating a ruckus. After which 'despair' and 'denial' overwhelm her but Shakuntala and Kalyani regulate her



emotions. Although her mind was occupied with the ashram and other widows, she still hoped that she would be able to leave ashram. Ultimately 'Detachment' comes which can be seen when Chuyia is accepting her life in *ashram*.

'Emotional Availability,' as defined by Mary Ainsworth and John Bowlby (334), also determines the security felt by child as parents' behaviour is reflected in their attachment towards their children. Chuyia's early marriage shows detachment from parents' side who were willing to marry her at such a young age. It also gives a glimpse of how much Chuyia, herself, is invisible for her own parents which results in avoidant type of attachment between Chuyia and her parents. Leela's family treated the matter of Leela's marriage in a similar way, but she was loved openly by her family. She had a secure attachment with her caregivers. If Bhagya had followed a more violent disciplinarian way of parenting, then Chuyia's attachment towards her mother would have been less. It is a contradiction for a child who gets hurt by their parents yet depend on them for survival. Parents form a caregiving cycle towards child in which they treat their children in the way they see fit. This caregiving only reflects what the parents think is best for their child. This can be affected by the insecurity of parents and failure to understand change in society with time.

In contrast with Bhagya and Somnath, Leela's parents are more concerned with their daughter's well-being. Even after being widowed, Leela's family allowed her education even when society dictated isolation of widows. But the social obligation of marrying a girl at such a young age was still followed by Leela's family. They could not grasp that a girl child has the potential to succeed in life without being wedded so early. Leela was able to prove her worth only because she showed that life of a widow confined in a house is a waste of her capabilities as she had the potential to grow in an academic environment. This separation from her family bore fruitful endeavours which is why she had less apprehension as compared to Chuyia who suffered anxiously in wait for her parents to rescue her.

This paper shows the resilience child characters gain due to their attachment and care towards their social relationships. This attachment shapes their life towards decisions which break society's false resilience towards beating them down. Education gives Leela a new weapon against the curse of being a widow. Her triumph comes when she takes the first step towards her new life after leaving her village and leaving all the injustice behind her. Choti also uses the same strength by throwing the pink colour of Holi on Noor during her funeral procession fulfilling her friend's most ardent wish and defying every pretentious norm which rendered Noor's life colourless.

Even so this resilience is often put down by other women who accepted their fate after initial tribulations. Child marriage, widowhood and isolation through widow ashram became allegorical to the forced trauma that many widows have already faced in their life. Bua's account also shows that the only thing she could remember of her childhood were the sweets of her wedding, not the husband or her family. Noor in *The Last Color* desired the touch of colour but could not because she was socially restricted in Varanasi. Shakuntala was bound by her religious beliefs but when she learned of judicial law regarding re-marriage of widows, she opened the doors for Kalyani. But the suffering of women of previous generations affected girls like Chuyia, Leela and Choti who possessed the courage to question and disregard these age-old customs when their small world is shattered because of the injustices and cruelties.

After Bua and Kalyani's death, Chuyia's perception of ashram deteriorates which is why when Madhumati gives her hope of returning to her parents, she clings to it. This is because after suffering from bereavement for her family for so long, she loses her new friends, Bua, and Kalyani, as well. Her guilt in Bua's accidental death as well as Kalyani's lost life shatters the last hope she had of breaking free from a life of widowhood. Psychologically, she has lost the battle of retaining her individuality in a system which has submerged many lives under it. She still faces even more when Madhumati manipulates Chuyia so that she could be forced into prostitution in place of Kalyani. She loses her fight completely after suffering from sexual assault at such a young age. Her drugged state after her rape shows her inability to even acknowledge Shakuntala's worries which render her blank. Sidhwa gives a glimpse on the process of removing widows socially, psychologically, and physically from the social system which deem them unworthy of a full life. Chuyia's vibrant childhood is filled with a gloomy abyss after suffering from the social evils of child marriage, separation from family and ultimately forced into prostitution. It is reflective of older widows' lives which are consciously forced into a closed space which is invisible to common people because their 'Otherness' makes them vulnerable to dangerous entities which take advantage of their social exclusion.

## Conclusion

Widowhood has always shown the ugly face of politicised religious belief systems. The whole structure of marriage brought destruction to those unfortunate enough to become a widow. This research tries to analyse the destructive effects it has on child widows who face these traumatic experiences when their cognitive abilities still need time to develop. The application of John Bowlby's Attachment Theory shows stagnation of development of child widows at a deeper level. The insecure environment of ashrams leads to lifelong maternal deprivation as is visible in older widows who are testament of an unfulfilled and wasted life. This presents the face of a successive generation which is void of identity and willpower. Even Separation Anxiety renders them emotionally unstable and ultimately detached from the world. Numerous stories from these ashrams specifically present a decline in child widows' emotional needs and force their personality into a dull robotic existence. Their economic status forces their life into an unending cycle of misery and poverty. This paper also shows that even after experiencing this ordeal, resilience of child characters shapes their life towards decisions which break society's false notions towards beating them down. They are often put down by other women who have already accepted their fate dictated by society.

Child marriage, widowhood and isolation are symbols of the forced trauma that many widows face in their life. These inhumane practices need multilevel refinement to uplift their life and reform society. It is important to create a better life for the next generation and the first step is progressive development on a physical and emotional level. The widow narratives through 20th-21st century literature and films are increasing dialogue on the importance of widow remarriage and further improvement in the livelihood of widows through portrayal of their traumatic and secluded life. The representation of the dire state of widows continues to evoke sympathetic sentiments and spiritual awakening in general population resulting in changing the perceptions and removal of restrictive cultural norms of widowhood. The subjugated state of female population is also changing with education and

economic independence, even after being widowed, moving Indian society towards an egalitarian structure.

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## ***Landays: Women's Secrets – At Home and In Exile***

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### *Abstract*

*Afghanistan, in the post-Soviet era, is subjected to numerous political upheavals and a series of wars. The people of Afghanistan are victims of internal displacement and exile. They are forcibly uprooted from their homes, to live in overcrowded refugee camps all over the world. The journey is treacherous and traumatizing. Afghan women are often subjected to inhuman conditions, exposed to conditions where their sense of honour is violated. They are victims of rape and torture. The Afghan male sense of honour demands the subjugation of women, and this is observed with zealous fervour in the refugee camps, where women bear the brunt of their displaced sense of male honour and helplessness. This paper aims to explore how landays (short oral poems) sung by women are expressions of rebellion and subtle protests against the double mutilation that Afghan women face in exile.*

*Keywords: exile, landays, rebellion, mutilation, trauma, body, women*

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### **Introduction**

*Landay* which means “the short one” is a very short poem of two lines, “It is, indeed, a very brief poem consisting of two verse lines of nine and thirteen syllables respectively, without any obligatory rhyme but with solid internal scansion. Depending on the region it is vocalized in different ways and frequently punctuates conversations.” (Majrouh, 2010). For centuries, Afghans have commemorated key events of their lives through *landays*. The history of a *landay* is difficult to trace. It is believed to pre-date Islam in Afghanistan. It is believed to be part of the Pashtun tribal oral folk poetry. Thus, “each *landay* is considered as precious as gold and a worthwhile investment to collect as many as possible. Its precise history is unknown. Some date them as far as 7000 years” (Daud, 16).

Eliza Griswold in her article for *The New York Times Magazine* titled “Why Afghan Women Risk Death to Write Poetry” written on April 27, 2012 documents the lives and death by suicide of Afghan women poets. What started as an attempt to document the death of Zarmina, the young girl who committed suicide when her poems were discovered by her brothers, led to the discovery of *landays*. Griswold calls it ‘investigative poetry’ due to the secretive nature of the oral poems and the painstaking task to collect them. Women in Afghanistan sing and recite *landays*, as a medium of protest against the masochistic religious

and cultural structures that restrict their lives. They indeed risk death and harsh retributions to produce these two-line oral poems.

*Landay*, which in the Pashto translation means ‘a short, poisonous snake,’ may be interpreted in two ways. The poems are like a double-edged sword- a weapon of resistance or death for the women caught reciting it. *Landays* are two-lined oral poems. They are often sung by womenfolk as they go about with their daily lives. *Landays* are anonymous in nature, and their author is often unknown. This anonymity makes it a powerful means of protest. It is a common practice to improvise an age-old *landay* with contemporary themes. The *landays* sung by women are earthly songs; songs that affirm and celebrate the sensual desires of women. They are songs that are world-affirming. They are songs that document the lived-reality of Afghan women. *Landays* may be interpreted as a gentle protest against the toxic masculinity and religious fundamentalism that restricts the lives of Afghan women. *Landays* are the songs women sung while baking bread, at the village well, and at the refugee camps in foreign countries.

Gender roles are well-defined in Afghanistan. To move beyond prescribed gender roles is considered a social taboo that must be punished harshly. Afghanistan is an inherently patriarchal society shaped by localized beliefs and gender relations. The idea of being male and female is dictated by patriarchal interpretations of Islamic laws and beliefs. Gender roles and identities are enforced by successive political and local hegemonic powers. During the Taliban regime, women's freedom and mobility were restricted in the name of religion. The Taliban regime resorts to an extreme form of traditionalism and conservatism to enforce their hegemony. Force was implemented to an extreme level. Punishments were harshly meted out to those that dare to break the laws of Islam. The rules against women were mostly created by men, who were moulded in the madrassas (religious institution), with little or no interaction with women.

*Landays* may be interpreted as an act of catharsis, a process where meanings are produced and created by women for women through its cycle of repetition and re-telling. In Afghanistan, it is shameful for a 'good' woman to sing. Singing, dancing and reciting poetry was banned by the Taliban, as they decreed it against the dictums of Islam. Zarmina's death and suicide, her act of ultimate protest - self-immolation of her body, was denied vehemently by her mother. The idea of a daughter committing suicide for love and poetry brings too much dishonour to the family. The idea of an educated daughter who writes a poem undermines the patriarchal familial code of honour:

Zarmina's father, Kheyal Mohammad, remained silent. Zarmina burned to death two years earlier, her mother said. "It was an accident. She was trying to get warm after a bath, but the firewood was wet, so she poured gasoline on it and caught herself on fire." Zarmina's father nodded assent. No, their daughter absolutely did not like writing, reading, or poetry. "She was a good girl, an uneducated girl," Zarmina's mother said. "Our girls don't want to go to school."

"The mother is lying," Zurai whispered. (Griswold,23)

Yet Zarmina is just one of the thousand women who continue to compose *landays* all over Afghanistan. They give us an insight into the intimate world of Afghan women who suffer from subjugation at home and are victims of double mutilation in exile:

*My body belongs to me;  
To others its mastery. (Griswold ,87)*

## Thematic Concerns At Home

One of the pre-dominant themes of *landays* is the celebration of women's bodies. Women's body is described with much boldness and honesty. The sensual women described in the *landays* present a stark contrast to the Afghan women in the public sphere. The disparity of the lives of Afghan women, the contrast between the public roles of the women and their private lives are reflected in the *landays*. The anonymous nature of the *landays* allows women to celebrate their sensuous desires. The women's body and its depiction in the *landays* becomes a site of ideological battle. In a society, where women are expected to cover up their bodies, songs that celebrate the body acquire political significance and meaning. It is a site of resistance against the masochistic, religious fundamentalism that tries to subjugate women's bodies. The woman's body is the text on which patriarchy has written some of its most scriptable messages. By celebrating her body and its desires, the Afghan woman debunks the patriarchal code of honour that attempts to silence her:

The body, too, has become then the literal site on which resistance and oppression have struggled, with the weapon being in both cases the physical signs of cultural difference, veils and wigs, to use Kadiatu Kanneh's terms, symbols, and literal occasions of the power struggles of the dominator and the dominated for possession of control and identity. Such struggles have often articulated the further intersections of race with gender and class in the construction of the colonized as subject and subaltern. (Ashcroft et al.290)

The woman described in the *landay* establishes herself as the absolute mistress of her body. She is the voice of authority that defines what will happen with her body. This image is a far cry from the woman in the public sphere whose body bears the burden of the patriarchal code of honour. She commands her lover to adore her body, on her own terms:

*Learn how to consume my mouth!*

*First place your lips on mine, then gently force my teeth apart.*

\*

*I have only yielded you the privilege of my mouth,  
Do not go looking for the knots of my waistband, it  
Will be in vain.*

\*

*Gently slide your hand inside my sleeves,*

*The pomegranates of Kandahar have blossomed and They are ripe. (Majrouh, 33)*

The pomegranates of Kandahar are allusions to her breast. In a contemporary rendition of the poem, the 'sleeve' becomes the bra of a woman. The adaptable nature of a *landay* makes it a powerful medium of protest. Meanings are contingent and recreated subtly, resounding with the quiet protests of women.

*I'll make a tattoo of my lover's blood*

*And shame each rose in the green garden. (Griswold, 13)*

Here the woman is alluding to the ancient tribal practice of *khaal* (tattoo) which baby girls receive at birth to ward off the evil eye, "the faces of older Pashtun women, however are dotted with rough-hewn-circles, moons, and flowers. Carved into their skin with a nail and packed with ash, the tattoos are living reminders of a pre-Islamic history of their people"

(Griswold,14); by writing a tattoo with her lover's blood on her body, the woman here subtly challenges the ancient patriarchal code of honour demands purity of the body and soul from women.

*My body is fresh as henna leaf  
green outside; inside, raw meat. (Griswold,65)*

The *landay* here refers to the practice of painting a bride's hand and feet with henna before her wedding. The *henna* ceremony is bittersweet as it reflects the predicament of a young bride, sold off, like a lump of raw meat, to her husband. It reflects the anxiety of the bride as she embarks on a new life where she is expected to serve her husband and mother-in-law with utmost humility. She knew that her life as a wife and mother will be ridden with strife and hardships.

After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the country witnessed numerous wars and upheavals. The Soviet invasion of the country marked the beginning of decades of war and violence. The succession of powers by various local factions and international powers in Afghanistan is reflected in the *landays* sang by women. The theme or subject of a *landay* is constantly changing; they are composed to commemorate a particular event or feelings. With the political unrest that envelope Afghanistan, the subjects of *landays* are no longer confined to honour and love. The *landays* of the last few decades are a reflection of the political situation in Afghanistan and its impact on the common people.

*Landays* that sing of heroes and martyrs are common motifs post the Soviet invasion. One could discern a surge in the spirit of nationalism and love for their homeland. Afghanistan as a nation-state is exalted and celebrated in the *landays*. This sudden exaltation of the homeland maybe interpreted as a reaction to the foreign forces that invade their land. It may be interpreted as a counter-reaction to preserve their identity and culture from the forces that threaten their way of life:

*My love gave his life for our homeland,  
I'll sew his shroud with a strand of my hair. (Griswold,105)*

\*

*Dear Homeland, I bring good news:  
The infidels flee from your brutal embrace.*

*No matter how you shove me down  
I always honor my sacred Islam. (Griswold, 113)*

The threat of foreign culture led to the revival of fundamental Islam. The rise of the Mujaheddin and the Taliban may be interpreted partly as an attempt to preserve Afghan culture, religion, and traditions. Women are swept away by these tides of changes; policies are created by these new regimes where women have to bear the brunt of the androcentric discriminatory practices. The idea that homeland and honour need protection at the expense of women is reflected in the *landays* that sing of homeland and exile. The homeland, Afghanistan that is battered and exploited may be represented as a woman in the *landays*. Women do resent the exploitation of their homeland in the name of patriotism and honour. The *landays* reflect the anger of the women caught in the cross-fire of power scuffle between male hegemonic powers. One could discern the resentment against the Taliban and the invading neo-imperialist powers in the *landays*. Resentment and protests against the destruction of their homeland ruthlessly are depicted in the *landays* of the post-Soviet era:



*My body belongs to me;  
To others its mastery. (Griswold,87)*

\*

*You'll never be a mullah, talib, no matter what you do,  
Studying in your book, you see my green tattoo.*

\*

*Because you are a talib, I'll never kiss you.  
You'll spread my secrets the village through.*

\*

*May God bring death to all the village gossips  
So the bravest girls will be free of their wagging lips!*

\*

*If the Taliban weren't here for the world to see,  
These foreigners would be free to occupy every sacred country. (Griswold,115)*

War is a predominant theme in *landays*. Afghanistan, its constant political turmoil, and wars have deeply traumatized the psyche of the common people. Even though the wars are fought in the public arena by men, and considered the "work" of men, women bear the brunt of violence and instability. Women are the victims of war, yet their experiences and sufferings are hardly documented and acknowledged. They are often depicted as silent witnesses to the massive destructions of war.

Through the *landays*, one discovers the impact of war on Afghan women. Their feelings on the constant fighting are articulated through the *landays*. What the wars meant for the womenfolk and the attitudes of the women are expressed poignantly in the *landays*. Even though *landays* on war are devoid of any political motifs and agendas, one can discern the heartfelt voice of a mother, a wife, a sister, a daughter, and a beloved yearning for their loved ones. The *landays* on war sung by women are simple songs of protests. They are the songs of a mother worried about the fate of her sons. They are the songs of human emotions, raw and devoid of any power tussle.

*May God destroy your tank and your drone,  
You who destroyed my village, my home.(Griswold,125)*

\*

*My Nabi was shot down by a drone,  
May God destroys your sons, America, you murdered my own. (Griswold,  
125)*

\*

*May God destroy the Taliban and end their wars,  
They have made Afghan women into widows and whores. (Griswold, 129)*

\*

*Mother, come to the jailhouse window.  
Talk to me before I go to the gallows. (Griswold, 131)*

The *landays* on war sung by women are songs of protests against the violence that robs them of their family and loved ones. They protest against the loss of a way of life, the life that is uprooted by the wars fought in the name of honour and patriotism. For the womenfolk, the different wars are nothing but just a transference of power from one patriarchal faction to another. They are just passed on from one oppressive regime to other.

Words like 'drones', 'tanks', 'bombs', 'America' feature commonly in the war *landays* showing how much the neo-imperialist wars have penetrated the consciousness of the common people:

*May God destroy the White House and kill the man  
Who sent the U.S cruise missiles to burn my homeland.* (Griswold, 121)

\*

*Bush, don't be so proud of your armored car.  
My remoti bomb will blow it to bits from afar.* (Griswold, 121)

Yet, the *landays* also valorises war and heroism. Women sing *landays* that exalt martyrs and heroes. They inspire the menfolk to fight for their country with the spirit of altruism and honour. They sing of the bravery of Afghans in the face of the enemy:

*Women in Moscow cry:  
If our husbands fight Afghans, our husbands will die.* (Griswold, 119)

\*

*Go and fight in Kabul, my love,  
For you, I'll keep my body and my mouth intact.* (Majrouh, 55)

\*

*Son, if you desert our war,  
I shall curse everything and also the milk of my breasts.* (Majrouh,67)

\*

*Who will you be but a brave warrior,  
You who've drunk the milk of a Pashtun mother?* (Griswold,107)

Through the *landays*, it is observed that women do take part in the wars and conflicts. Numerous *landays* immortalized the bravery of women in wars. One such woman is Nahid, who took part in the great demonstration of April 1980. Women and girls from all walks of life participated in the demonstration, Russian tanks broke into the protesters killing and injuring many. In the tussle that followed, Nahid, one of the women organisers who coordinated the march was killed, "since then she has become the symbol of women's resistance and numerous *landays* have immortalized her name" (Majrouh, 29):

*The beautiful Nahid rose up and in her clear voice  
Cried:*

*Rise, my sisters! The motherland needs us for her defense.* (Majrouh, 40)

\*

*My sisters, tie your veils around like waistbands,  
Pick up rifles and go off to the battlefield.* (Majrouh,44)

## In Exile

Edward W. Said in "The Mind of Winter" describes the state of being in exile. He states that being in exile disrupts the sense of home and belonging. It uproots one from a familiar environment and cultural practices. It is a state of yearning and nostalgia for a way of life and a sense of loss:

Exile is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home. The essential sadness of the break can never be surmounted. There are indeed stories portraying exile as a condition that produces

heroic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in a person's life. But these are no more than stories, efforts to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement. The achievements of any exile are permanently undermined by his or her sense of loss. (Said, 439)

The post-Soviet era and its endless cycles of violence results in a mass exodus from the country. Afghan refugees flee to neighbouring countries in search of refuge and safety. Afghanistan witnesses massive upheavals and its people became victims of displacements, both internal and external:

Thus, in the course of the last nine years of war, Afghanistan has suffered the most barbarous devastation and the bloodiest massacres. Out of a population of sixteen million, four million fled to neighbouring states. This is the highest number of refugees in the world, to which should be added some three million deported from the interior, that is to say, all those who were transferred from one province to another or who came only to be compressed into Kabul. As for the dead, there are hundreds of thousands of them. (Majrouh,40)

In exile, women kept the tradition of *landays* alive, "at bottom, exile is a jealous state. With very little to possess, you hold onto what you have with aggressive defensiveness" (Said, 440). The *landays* are sung in the refugee camps. The harsh conditions of the refugee camps and exile do not extinguish the poetic creativity of the women. The painful living conditions of exile give them an irrepressible impetus. It inspires them to sing songs that are seeped with longings for their homeland and lost way of life. The *landays* of exile are songs that are seeped with nostalgia for their ancestral lands and glorification of martyrs:

In the resistance and among the refugees the number of those who devote themselves to poetry has markedly increased. If they know how to read and write they print collections of their poems; if not, they sing them, record them on audiocassettes, and try to distribute them. (Majrouh,41)

The women's *landays* from exile deal with the theme of absence and longing. It is devoid of fun and laughter. The exile *landays* are songs of an exodus. They sing of separation and despair. They sing of poverty and loss. The *landays* are addressed to inanimate objects like the wind and the mountains, which reflects the hopelessness of their present predicaments:

*Breeze, you who blow from the mountainside where my  
Lover fights,  
what message are you bringing me?*

\*

*And the wind responds:*

*The message from the distant lover is the smell of  
Gunpowder*

*And the dust of ruins that I carry with me. (Majrouh,42)*

Afghan women are forcibly uprooted from their familiar environment to live in dingy tents in overcrowded refugee camps. They are expected to quietly follow their men-folk to foreign lands, to countries where they do not understand the culture and language of the people. The woman in exile finds herself robbed of all her tasks and prerogatives. She is like a fish out of her elements. She misses her familiar surroundings and chores. Bound by

religious prejudices and honour code, she is confined to her tents. She can no longer go to the village well to collect water and exchange witty *landays* and gossips with her friends. She can no longer sing and dance at weddings:

*The woman in exile never stops dying,  
Turn her face, then, toward her native land so that she  
May breathe her last. (Majrouh,49)*

\*

*Great God of the exiled!  
How long must life on these arid plains go on?*

\*

*Tears are streaming down my face,  
I cannot forget Kabul's snow-topped mountains.*

\*

*New mountains are separating us,  
Birds alone will be our messengers and harbingers their  
Songs. (Majrouh,52)*

Afghan women in exile suffer 'double mutilation.' The Afghan male honour code demands more conformity in foreign lands. The Afghan male with his deep sense of isolation and displacements observe the honour code more fervently on foreign soil:

There is the immense fact of isolation and displacement, which produces the kind of narcissistic masochism that resists all efforts at amelioration, acculturation, and community. At this extreme the exile can make a fetish of exile, a practice that distances him or her from all connections and commitments. To live as if everything around you were temporary and perhaps trivial is to fall prey to petulant cynicism as well as to querulous lovelessness. (Said, 441)

He fails to understand the distress of the womenfolk. The trip to foreign lands is utterly dangerous. Women are forced to flee their homeland in utter poverty. They flee their country under inhumane conditions, in such distress that they cannot even afford to cover up their bodies. They are packed into trucks and transported like cattle. Modesty and honour are abandoned in the mad scuttle for refuge. Thousands are raped along the way. Many are forced into prostitution. Babies die along the way due to the harsh conditions. Exile for the Afghan women is nothing but a painful wound that blights her existence:

As for the men, they hardly notice the women's distress. They see them as useful auxiliaries they brought along just like the camels, goats, or horses that constitute their property. Nevertheless, without their knowing or feeling it, the women have stopped belonging to them. They have left their hearts behind and their souls are still roaming the valleys of Afghanistan. Through extra suffering, through re-doubled mutilation, they once again manage to deceive their companions, to dispossess them from what they own, since they are no longer anything but abandoned human beings. (Majrouh, 48)

## Conclusion

The concept of honour in Afghanistan is closely intertwined with the idea of maleness and virility. Among the Pashtun tribe, who forms the majority of the population, in Afghanistan safeguarding honour is a way of life. Their lives and collective identity as a tribal unit are bounded by the *Pashtunwali* (code of honour). Every member of the tribe is expected to play specific roles to maintain their code of honour. They are expected to conform to the dictums of the *Pashtunwali*. Failure to maintain honour incurs great shame and humiliation for the concerned subject. Retributions are quickly meted out to preserve the dignity of the tribe and family.

Women at home, in the post-Soviet conflict-torn Afghanistan bears the brunt of the androcentric code of honour. Their body bears the brunt of the masochistic code of honour that attempts to subjugate women. The *landays* sung by women are a testament to the mutilation women faced at home. The intense glorification of the women's bodies, presented in its full sensuousness reflects the resentment of the women against the code of honour that draws the line of propriety for women. The *landays* of exile show that Afghan women in exile are victims of double mutilation. They continue to bear the brunt of the male's growing insecurity and over-jealous sense of nationalism in foreign soil.

## Notes

*Henna* : refers to the temporary body art resulting from the staining of the skin from dyes.

*Khaal*: tattoo

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**Navigating Utopian Consciousness and Dystopian Paradox in  
Rokeya Hossain's *Sultana's Dream* and Manjula Padmanabhan's *Escape***

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*Abstract*

*Though there is a slew of critiques on women's visions of utopia/dystopia as a systematic worldview in which gender, body, sexuality, culture, environment, technology, psychology, and belief are negotiated, this paper examines the trajectory of these diverse generic forms so as to map out the shift from utopian vision to dystopian paradox in Rokeya Hossain's *Sultana's Dream* (1905) and Manjula Padmanabhan's *Escape* (2008). Admittedly, by demolishing old certainties in favour of a new, both the pioneers, Rokeya Hoassain and Manjula Padmanabhan in their speculative fiction present a more disconcerting vision of a feminist future . While there is a tremendous amount of significant research linking the recent trends in contemporary feminist theorizing about how and why events, practices, knowledge(s), texts are forms of expression of patriarchal power relations, there exists few studies which enable some understanding of the transformative potential as well as the ideological blind spots of this utopianism. Moreover, as we examine the trajectory from utopia to dystopia across the time and space, alternative realities come to the fore, which highlight the unpleasant and bleak existing realities when India's daughters have been subjected to endless exploitation since centuries by phallogocentric state apparatus. This paper addresses these issues through a close and contextualized readings of Rokeya Hossain's *Sultana's Dream* (1905) and Manjula Padmanabhan's *Escape* ( 2008) through an investigation of subversions envisioned by two potent voices.*

*Keywords : Utopia , Dystopia, speculative vision, consciousness, paradox*

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The emerging canon of feminist dystopian literature reflects a growing preoccupation among writers, who not only champion the cause of women's rights but also exhibit the ambient fear that progress toward equality between the sexes has been stalled or may be reversed. Admittedly, the concept of utopia with its Greek pun on a good place ( ou-topos) and no-place (eu-topos) offers a simultaneous paradox, an ideal yet beyond reach. But insofar as it is a place or world that has been imagined, it provides a glimpse of the entire spectrum and scope of human imagination as far as the existence of alternate better is concerned. The utopian imagination represents hope, and freedom, just as feminist thought reinforces reform and amelioration. What is significant here is that both feminism and utopia focus on the causes rather than on purpose in end. Dystopia, on the other hand "involves utopia's opposite: a nightmare, the ultimate flawed world, or 'a society worse than

the existing one” (Wilson 2). What Wilson suggests is that “utopia and dystopia create new worlds, establish genre, and critique gender roles, traditions, and values.” Admittedly, in this creation of the new worlds, women’s writing holds a privileged site for its articulation of a utopian consciousness and its dystopian paradox.

Raffaella Baccolini and Andrew Milner in their theorization of dystopian science fiction argue that both utopia and dystopia move concurrently in a text . In “The Persistence of Hope in Dystopian Science Fiction” Raffaella Baccolini elucidates dystopian fiction when she writes “[u]topia is maintained in dystopia, traditionally a bleak, depressing genre with no space for hope in the story, only outside the story: only by considering dystopia as a warning can we as readers hope to escape such a future” (520). Likewise, Andrew Milner discusses this same idea in the chapter “Science Fiction and Dystopia” of *Locating Science Fiction* (2012) when he says that “there are two main kinds of loosely ‘dystopian’ text” (116), one of which is the critical dystopia “which functions by way of a warning” (116). Both Baccolini and Milner emphasize upon the warning in dystopian fiction, which has the undertones of hope so as to escape from such a bleak future. Foregrounding Baccolini and Milner’s argument that utopian aspect lies in the hope when we read the text as a warning, this paper aims to unpack the different formulations of the concept of utopia to explore some of the many connections (both conceptual and historical) between feminism and utopia not just in terms of its literary form, but in terms of its social, cultural and political undercurrents too. While there is a tremendous amount of significant research linking the recent trends in contemporary feminist theorizing about how and why events, practices, knowledge(s), texts are forms of expression of patriarchal power relations, but there are a very few studies which enable some understanding of the transformative potential as well as the ideological blind spots of this utopianism. This paper aims to address these issues through simultaneously close and contextualized readings of Rokeya Shakawat Hossain’s *Sultana’s Dream* (1905) and Manjula Padmanabhan’s *Escape* (2008).

Among the most influential female pioneers of utopian and dystopian fiction, to name a few, Ursula K. Le Guin, Octavia Butler, Margaret Atwood, Marge Peiercy and Angela Carter, Begum Rokeya Shakawat Hossain, occupies a pioneering role for her portrayal of the feminist utopia of Ladyland in *Sultana’s Dream* in 1905, a full decade before Charlotte Gilman’s *Herland*. Hossain’s feminist utopia with its reversal of gendered roles in the wonders of “Ladyland”, is a canonical text which is a founding text of feminist utopian consciousness in the Indian context.. In addition to this, the text is one of the precursors of science fiction, which appeared in the pages of *Indian Ladies Magazine*, the first magazine in India by a woman and for women. Rokeya Shekhawat Hossain was born in 1880 into an elite Bengali Muslim family and her mother was the first of her father’s four wives. Hers was a family where woman lived in strict purdah, were secluded in a zenana and were taught languages like Arabic only for reciting ‘Quran’. Hossain received her education in home along with her two sisters, however, her brother taught her Bengali and English secretly and gradually she realized the significance and power of education for women. Understandably, Hossain’s perspicacity and literary sensibilities started developing at a young age and thereafter she emerged as a powerful writer, journalist, educationist and pioneering reformer of Bengali Muslim society in early 20<sup>th</sup> century colonial India.

Rokeya Hossain’s *Sultana’s Dream* is a story which opens with Sultana walking on the streets of ‘Ladyland’ with Sister Sara as she learns about this fascinating country that is



entirely different from her Muslim world. The protagonist's name, Sultana is a woman-equivalent of Sultan, who is "thinking lazily of the condition of Indian womanhood" when she falls asleep and wakes up in Ladyland. It is a country where men are banished to the mardana and look after the domestic life, while women rule the country. In response to Sultana's protest that women should be protected and secluded since they are "naturally weak," Sara offers the irrefutable logic that since men are dangerous like wild animals or lunatics, it is they who must be locked up-whereas in our world "Men who do or at least are capable of doing no end of mischief, are let loose and the innocent women are shut up in the zenana!" Sara blames women for their own incarceration: "You have neglected the duty you owe to yourselves, and you have lost your natural rights by shutting your eyes to your own interests." Through such a portrayal of Ladyland where men are invisible in domestic spaces, and women manage the worldly affairs under the enlightened rule of a queen, the society is crime-free, peaceful and bountiful, as Sara explains, "We make nature yield as much as she can..., so that there is electricity and aerial transport, clean streets and lush gardens in the land; and pleasurable labour, plenty of leisure, no crime and no disease." Sultana learns how matriarchal power was established after the women scientists defeated an enemy state with their scientific feats, when men had failed. The story ends with Sultana waking up from her dream and realizing that she is still in her bedroom thinking about the condition of women in colonial India.

Through an examination of *Sultana's Dream* that I undertake here, I wish to engage the question of feminist utopia envisioned by Hossain, which has been centered on social and political reform in India. The story addresses the issue of emergence of women educators and leaders particularly at a time when women education was seen more as a privilege rather than a necessity and the writer's reinforcement of presence of all-girls' schools and colleges and restriction on marriage before the age of twenty one in Ladyland is although her utopian vision, it seems so relevant in the current scenario also when significant thrust is laid on girl child's education. Furthermore, Hossain's use of English language when a small segment of society was made to learn English language is her act of fighting against "linguistic colonialism". (Alam 2006:xv) It is significant to note that the Ladyland with its green carpet on which people walk, no roads and railways and use of solar power for cooking instead of coal or chimneys hints at ecological mismanagement during colonial India and which is indeed a present reality as well. Hossain is writing during a time when British were rearranging agricultural practices and by presenting an alternative world, she emphasizes on utilization of science to sustain life and to nurture environment.

The utopian vision of Hossain, although is an outburst against various religious, social, political and ecological forces which have been oppressing women and nature in the early twentieth century, it seems symptomatic of the rampant misogynistic violence even in the twenty first century. Sara's declaration, "You need not be afraid of coming across a man here. This is Ladyland, free from sin and harm" echoes the gender tyranny which the feminine gender has been subjected to by the masculine since ages. Nevertheless, the story is not solely an attack on the male sex. The writer could not have been oblivious of the ideological implications of an idealised female ruler maintaining segregation and retaining the sexual division of labour while merely inverting it. Therefore, it is suggestive of Hossain's utopian vision, which is free from domination of power. Nevertheless, as we move from Hossain's utopia of twentieth century to Manjula Padmanabhan's dystopia of

twenty first century, it appears that the utopian vision has attained frightening paradoxical proportions as the civilization progressed and not much has been achieved on the gender scale.

Manjula Padmanabhan, a contemporary writer, artist and playwright who divides her time between India and US is one of the most potent literary voices from India who gained visibility with her popular comic strip, “Suki” published in *The Hindu* during 1980s. An author of several acclaimed works like *Harvest*, *Kleptomania*, *The Three Virgins and Other Stories*, Padmanabhan claims to live in a ‘surreal and dystopian world’ where as an artist and writer she engages with the larger world. In the current global renaissance of feminist dystopian fiction, Manjula Padmanabhan holds the distinction of taking the trajectory of Indian feminist thought into the realms of science fiction with the publication of her dystopian novel *Escape* (2008) and its sequel, *The Island of Lost Girls* (2015). “What I like about science fiction,” wrote Manjula Padmanabhan in the Introduction to her short-story collection *Kleptomania*, “is that it offers a writer the opportunity to go directly to the heart of an ironical or thought-provoking situation by setting up a theoretical world. It’s a bit like writing a problem in mathematics, reducing reality to a tangle of pipes and cisterns or a group of three people traveling at varying speeds up a mountain, in order to reveal the relationships between matter, time and space.”

Contrary to Rokeya’s world governed by women, Padmanabhan presents a dystopian paradox in *Escape* (2008) which takes us to a land bereft of women. The novel is set in a nameless country, and this anonymity understandably gives it a universal identity as a nation. Nevertheless, the writer subtly hints at Indianness of her nameless futuristic land through the use of words such as ‘veena,’ malamal, kurtas, paan and ‘parantha’. Padmanabhan’s dystopian reality shifts us to a horrifying version of India in view of declining sex-ratio rooted in our socio-cultural bias against women. This increasing misogyny is reflected in Padmanabhan’s dystopic future where women have been completely exterminated and are seen as a “vermin.”

An atmosphere of fear and uncertainty, where enslaved minds and impassive robotic human beings live is the dystopian world of Padmanabhan. It is a country which is ruled by Generals who are absolute dictators, emotionless clones and continue to regenerate themselves. Calling themselves as ‘eternal us’, they aspire to attain perfection and are determined to destroy what hinders their quest as they openly declare, “There is only one self . . . Many bodies, one self...We think as one.” (92) . To achieve this technological perfectionism, they have erased the past, exterminated the women and destroyed every form of diversity and nature, which they perceive as a threat. By transporting us to such a dystopian world, the writer satirizes the tyrannical tendencies of power-hungry rulers in nation states like India. General’s self-aggrandizing declaration is a premonition of dark bleak future where the powerful possess grotesque possibilities,

We are the future. Fear us.....our version of reality will prevail . . .

We are the logical endpoint of evolution... We have no fear of after lives or retribution, hells or heavens. We are the past the future and the present. We have broken through the shackles of individuality. Each one of us encapsulates infinity. We represent the next horizon of mankind. Through us, Man will scale heights previously undreamed of . . .” (379)

Unlike Rokeya's Ladyland of green carpets and ecological utopianism, the General's country is a radioactive wasteland, devoid of any life forms and flattened into a rubble by atomic bombings. The nuclear radiations have caused such intense loss of life that more than half of the population is perished whereas those who have survived are either in a vegetative state or undergoing trauma of physical and mental disabilities. Due to extermination of women, families are deprived of progeny whereas some have agreed to reproduction through cloning. Hence, cloning has replaced reproduction and heterosexuality has been taken over by heterosexuality. Above all, the life of such dead population is monitored by Generals and his hellish army of clones is known as 'Boyz', who are ruthless and barbaric.

Both nature and women, who are the supreme sources of natural reproduction have been destroyed by Generals. Amidst such mayhem, Meiji, the sole survivor, who lives with her three uncles - Eldest, Middle and Youngest, collectively represent the sole hidden resistance against the omnipotent government. All the three uncles represent subversion of hegemonic gender legacy and hint at ruthless oppression of masculinitic militaristic state apparatus. If Eldest has prophetic vision and insight, Middle is intelligent and meticulous, while Youngest with his affection and empathy is Meiji's confidant. In their underground dungeons equipped with sophisticated surveillance weapons, they keep the girl alive. Although, their plan to raise her and educate her is admirable but seems life-threatening. Their conversation reveals the horror of life in a tyrannical state, when the Eldest says,

That has been the fate of our entire generation,  
Inevitability was thrust upon us like a skewer through  
chunks of meat. We can choose to smile as we're exposed  
to the fire or we can frown – but nothing we do will alter  
the nature of the fire or our fate. (28)

Prior to the technology-driven cataclysm which eliminated women folk, these three brothers led a life of peace and prosperity. Nevertheless, after the catastrophic change, they well equipped themselves with technology so as to protect themselves and Meiji against the Generals. Nonetheless, during the process of this safeguarding Meiji led a life of intense isolation, as she had no interaction with the outside world to the extent that she was not even aware of her femininity. Here lies the paradox of Padmanabhan's dystopian world and Rokeya's utopian vision, as both symbolize the fate of women in patriarchal societal set up where women are made to lead a life of forced ignorance and denial of knowledge and freedom. The setting of the novel as a radioactive wasteland echoes capitalistic masculinistic and misogynistic social framework which is unfavourable to women. In the similar vein, Rupali Palodkar avers:

In Indian society, the ownership of women's body and sexuality and that of land (nature) has continued to vest with men since ancient times. Of all places in the world, it is in India that sex-selective abortions are practiced on a wide-scale, especially in the northern part of the country.... There is a need to find an alternative to men's exploitation of the earth... and to discover an ecologically sound way of life that would not threaten the existence either of the earth or of women. (4)

Meiji's journey, as designed by her three uncles is undeniably stupendous and highlights the horrors of a world where women no longer exist. This further jeopardizes Meiji's existence, which is lamented by her uncle that they live in a "world that denies her the right to live"

(53). However, Meji's journey beyond the radioactive wasteland also brings about her self-awareness in view of her interaction with the socio-cultural set-up of the world. Finally as her real identity is revealed to her that Youngest is her father and her mother sacrificed herself to save her from autocratic Generals, Meji is distressed but then begins her awareness of her identity and sexuality. Finally, Meji's escape is suggestive of women's subversive potential as well as resilient power, as she vows to come back and take her father out of the wasteland. Basundhara Chakraborty writes that the novel is not just, "a dystopic fiction but it is something beyond it. It is a tale of human quest against all odds. The name of the protagonist of the novel deserves attention in this context...Meiji in Japanese means "enlightened peace". It is an inspiring narrative of human victory against tyrannical power" (85)

Ostensibly, the novel is a spine-chilling account of future which the author envisages in view of alarming decline in child sex ratio which is 914 females per 1000 males according to 2011 census. The horrifying portrayal of public execution of the feminine gender which one of the uncles recollects is a horrifying childhood experience for him, when, "females had been discovered on his property" and General's Boz set out to destroy them with abominable barbarity. A reflection of such memories highlight the magnitude of cruelty meted out to women since centuries, but at the same time, it shows their tremendous stoical strength. Hence, Padmanabhan's dystopian vision of "lost universe of womanhood" seems a logical repercussion of women's oppression and exploitation in modern nation-states like India. The novelist shared the genesis of the novel, when she said, "In the case of *Escape*, the idea presented itself originally as a newspaper 'middle' which would take the form of a page from the diary of the last Indian woman left alive...I kept thinking that despite all the positive stuff going on, it seemed more likely that women – Indian women anyway – appeared to be on the decline. So that was the context. around 2006 I began to think of turning that idea into a novel" (qtd. in Palodkar 57-58).

Matthew Arnold's much cited famous statement in his 1857 Oxford Inaugural Lecture, "Everywhere there is connection, everywhere there is illustration, no single, event, no single literature is adequately comprehended except in relation to other events, to other literatures" draws attention to connections between literatures across temporal, linguistic and cultural boundaries. In the similar vein, the two radical texts under comparison in this paper, although belong to diverse genre, that of utopian and dystopian science fiction, the connecting strand between them is the re-visioning technique of writers belonging to different centuries.. Rokeya Hossain's upbringing in an orthodox environment in colonial India where education of girls was rare and restricted stand in complete contrast to Manjula Padmanabhan's liberal outgoing upbringing in a metropolitan city of contemporary postcolonial India. In spite of such diverse biographical background, both the writers have commonality in terms of their sharp insights and critique of society which gives unequal treatment and unjust share to women. If Hossain traverses a world where reality has been flipped, Padmanabhan's dystopic vision of no woman's world is another extreme reality so as to critique the entrenched gender hierarchy and misogyny in Indian society since centuries. Both the writers present intertwined relationship between science, patriarchy and power – In *Ladyland* there is peace and prosperity due to the inventions of "solar ovens, flying cars, and cloud condensers, which offer abundant clean water", suggesting rejection of masculinistic militaristic expansion. In the similar vein, Padmanabhan's dystopian *Wasteland*

of totalitarianism and environmental disaster resulting in fear and violence is suggestive of the disastrous proportions which endless greed and lust for power has yielded.

## Conclusion

Through an examination of the trajectory of utopian/ dystopian science fiction and a juxtaposition of ‘Ladyland’ and ‘Wasteland’, this paper establish both Hossain and Padmanabhan as radical champions who envision and propose new masculinities by rejecting hierarchical framework to uphold equality, fraternity and freedom Whereas on the one hand Sultana’s dream highlight social prejudices vis-à-vis women’s education and their potential to create harmonious society in twentieth century, Meiji’s captive existence lamented by her, “can anyone want to live like this, always hiding, always terrified, your little captive freak?”(387) hint at gruesome reality of prevalent gender injustice which has attained horrifying proportions in the twenty first century. Amartya Sen, one of the powerful thinkers of times succinctly pointed out in *Development as Freedom (1999)* pertaining what women confront on various fronts : “survival inequality, natality inequality, unequal facilities, ownership inequality, unequal sharing of household benefits and chores, and domestic violence and physical victimization”(224). Admittedly, as we investigate Sultana’s dream and Meiji’s escape, we confront a paradoxical situation to realise that the claim of radical feminist who envisaged scientific advancement in biotechnology and cybernetics as a panacea for women’s liberation holding no ground. The most radical, isolated and visionary declaration of its times made by Shulamith Firestone way back in 1970, "There is not even an *utopian* feminist literature in existence," not only problematizes the utopian vision of Hossain but also challenges the critical dystopian speculative vision of Padmanabhan. There is a dire need for a re-visioning of existing realities in tune with what Amartya Sen envisions, “We need a fuller cognizance of the power and reach of women's enlightened and constructive agency and an adequate appreciation of the fact that women's power and initiative can uplift the lives of all human beings - men, women and children. Gender-inequality is a far-reaching societal impairment, not merely a special deprivation of women.” Therefore, here we are left with some pressing questions unanswered – that be it the utopia, postmodern cyborg or dystopia, the ultimate goal of social emancipation and ‘societal impairment’ through such radical creative means require greater thought and action.

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## **The Pathology of Partition: Analyzing the Trauma of Partition and its Psychological Disorders in the Select Short Fiction of Bhisham Sahni**

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### *Abstract*

*The psychological after-effects of the 1947 Partition of India, primarily in the form of traumatic neuroses, constitute one of the emerging areas of critical engagement in the broad domain of Partition Studies. Unlike the physical violence, the psychological wounds of Partition could not be convalesced immediately. The deep-rooted traumas of partition lead to further psychological disorders. Looking at its fictional representations, primarily the short partition fiction of Bhisham Sahni, we may find that most of the characters in Sahni's short stories suffer from the 'belated experience' of Partition trauma that continues to haunt their lives later on and affects their behavioural patterns. Sahni's short narratives on Partition like "The Train Has Reached Amritsar," "Take Me Home," "Pali" and "Veero" have depicted the traumatic disorders of the victims more than the partition violence. This paper would focus on the select short Partition fiction of Sahni from a psychoanalytic point of view and try to explore the psychological trauma of Partition and its associated pathogenic effects as reflected in these stories.*

*Keywords: Partition and Psychological Trauma, Pathology of Partition, Psychological Disorders in Bhisham Sahni's Fiction*

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In an interview with Alok Bhalla on the theme of Partition, the Sahitya Academy Award winner of modern Hindi Literature, Bhisham Sahni has rightly pointed out the main crux of the Partition induced violence and its associated guilt or trauma in the following words:

I think barbarism is not a permanent feature of human conduct. It depends on a combination of circumstances which somehow incite man's baser instincts. Under certain circumstances men lose all sense of decency and proportion, and indulge in butchery. After some time, the barbaric impulses slowly subside and give way to reason. Men begin to repent their actions. (Bhalla 132)

Sahni has suggested here that Partition violence in its varied forms stemmed out from a particular situation or "a combination of circumstances" that consequently engulfed almost the entire social fabric. Widespread 'barbarism' in the form of communal frenzy and the innate desires of the masses to annihilate the 'other' predominated in the social sphere in such a way that men were seen, as Sahni puts it, to be devoid of their basic human traits as if they had lost "all sense of decency and proportion" and solely indulged in "butchery." The horrific cataclysm of Partition, in fact, turned millions of common civilians to bloodthirsty, communal, barbaric beasts, and 'bestiality' (Chakraborti 101) emerged as one of the

foremost guiding metaphors in the majority of the Partition fiction of Punjab province. This sudden change of the mass civilized beings to violent beasts in the wake of a particular historical juncture could be analyzed with the help of a number of other inter-disciplines like Psychoanalysis, Trauma Studies, and Violence Studies and many others.

In fact, the psychological after-effects of 1947 Partition of India, primarily in the form of traumatic neuroses, constitute one of the emerging areas of critical engagement in the broad domain of Partition Studies. A number of responses are coming, very recently, in the late 2010s and the early 2020s, from the mainstream Psychiatry and Trauma Studies Departments, that have mostly been silent about the horrendous traumatic aftermaths of Partition violence. The unprecedented physical violence that occurred during and after the Partition of India, in the forms of multiple sectarian attacks, mass carnage, riots, arson, brutal rapes, and body humiliations had been subjected to gradual convalescence with the passage of time. The psychological wounds along with the deep-rooted traumas, however, could not be surmounted overnight. On the contrary, they have led to multiple forms of pathological neurosis in thousands of its victims like Anxiety Disorder, madness, panic attacks, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Acute Stress Disorder, Repetitive Compulsive Disorder, Emotionally unstable personality disorder (EUPD), Rape Trauma Syndrome (RTS) paranoia, and so on. This interdisciplinary dialogue between Partition Studies and Mental Health Studies (Trauma Studies and Psychoanalysis) is altogether a new domain of research that needs critical attention.

If we look at the body of Partition Literature of Punjab province, we could see that a good number of writers of Partition fiction like Intizar Hussain, Mohan Rakesh, Krishan Chander, Khuswant Singh, Chaman Nahal, Rajinder Singh Bedi, Saadat Hasan Manto, and Ismat Chughtai among others have been keenly interested in representing both the physical as well as the psychological aspect of Partition violence, although the psychological aspect has not been much discussed. There has been another leading writer who, in his short fictional pieces, is able to capture the traumatic aspect of Partition violence and its attendant pathological disorders. He is none other than Bisham Sahni (1915-2003). His fictional masterpiece *Tamas* (1974) has vividly recorded the gloomy atmosphere of communal tension in the form of interethnic violence. But his short narratives of Partition like “Amritsar Aa Gaya” (The Train Has Reached Amritsar), “Mujhe Mere Ghar Le Chalo” (Take Me Home), “Pali” and “Veero”, have focused more on the traumatic disorders of the victims than on representing partition violence.

This paper would be analysing Partition from a psychoanalytical point of view, especially, how Partition has led to a kind of collective Psychological Trauma and its associated pathogenic effects, as reflected in the select short stories of Bisham Sahni. I shall focus on the two short stories of Sahni: “The Train Has Reached Amritsar” and “Take Me Home” taking help from the theoretical models of trauma and psychopathology, given by Cathy Caruth, Sigmund Freud and a few other trauma theorists.

## II

Cathy Caruth, the doyen of Trauma Theory, suggests that psychological trauma arises out of certain unpleasant or distressing events that consequently fragment the identity of an individual and the trauma continues to bedevil the victims later on in their lives.



(Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 4) Looking at the body of Partition Literature of Punjab province, especially the short partition fiction of Bisham Sahni from a psychoanalytical gaze, one may find that a number of characters of Sahni (much like those of Manto and Chughtai) behave in a chaotic way due to the psychological trauma they have imbibed during Partition. Sahni's protagonists suffer from different sorts of psychic disorders that sometimes last for a few hours to a few days, and sometimes they linger throughout their lives. For example, Nathu's guilt consciousness in Sahni's *Tamas* is very much prolonged; whereas the traumatic disorders of the protagonists in his short partition stories are quite ephemeral or short-lived. The first story that I am going to analyze captures the psychological/ traumatic disorder of a man that lasts for a brief period of time. In the story "Amritsar Aaa Gaya" (The Train Has Reached Amritsar),<sup>1</sup> we observe a sudden change in the mood/behaviour of a timid, frail-looking Babu, who suddenly got so furious due to certain external stimuli like humiliations, jeering remarks, mockeries about his sexual potency, his preference of food habits etc. by a group of men that he satisfied his *ego* only through avenging the life of an innocent old man from the rival community.

Narrated mostly in the first person, the story recounts a train journey during the high tide of Partition from the newly created Pakistan to the other side of the border. Among the passengers were a Sardarji, three Pathans and a "frail looking" Babu, an old woman, and a few other passengers along with the narrator in the same compartment. Most of them were engaged in casual talks, occasional debates, funny gossips, jeering, teasing etc. The passengers were absolutely confused about the newly created border, the abrupt decision of the creation of Pakistan, and its terrible consequences. But the topic that fascinated them most was the bloody riots that were happening all around. Each one of them was very much tensed about an imminent attack on the train that may occur at any moment during the course of their journey. However, a group of Pathans was absolutely indifferent to the apprehension of the other passengers. Contrarily, they were busy cutting jokes at the frail-looking Babu by offering him the boiled meat and a piece of *naan* in a very jovial manner knowing full well that he won't accept the meal. One of the Pathans told him

Here, Babu, eat. You will become strong like us. Your wife will be pleased. Eat it, dalkhor. You are weak because you only eat dal. (2)

The Pathans continued to make fun of him and a few other passengers joined the process soon. Time and again the Pathans tittered at his masculinity, his sexual potency, and gendered identity etc, the issues that the Babu wanted to avoid inwardly but could not help it. The harmless jeering of the Pathans turned out to be an acute source of trauma for the Babu as he felt constantly humiliated. According to Sigmund Freud, disturbing or chaotic situations like this may lead to a kind of "traumatic neurosis" in the victim (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 16) which may split off the *self* of the affected one. (Freud 8) This is quite evident in the story.

As the train reached Wazirabad station and the news of the communal riots was approaching the passengers, the Babu got very much frightened and continued to babble absentmindedly that something was wrong (3). The tense situation deteriorated quickly and an "eerie silence" pervaded all over the compartment. As soon as a couple tried to climb up the over-crowded compartment with a huge bundle of luggage, one of the Pathans kicked them off. The Babu witnessed this incident but preferred to remain silent. Contrarily, the Babu became so much hyper-vigilant about an uncertain dread that he became panicked and

“looked deathly pale.” (5) When the news of a riot reached the passengers and everyone within the compartment was pulling their windows down and a loud rattling sound approached, the Babu leaped off from his seat and reclined on the floor of the compartment out of utter panic. To humiliate him, the Pathans resumed their mocking remarks:

Oh, coward, are you a man or a woman? Don't lie there on the floor. You are a disgrace to all men. (6)

However, the Babu did not pay any attention to them as he was trembling with fear and the sense of panic disrupted his normal physical movement: “The Babu's lips were dry. He stammered something and then fell silent.” (6) This traumatic happening may be termed as Acute Stress Disorder (ASD), which generally arises in a victim out of certain threats of death or some serious injuries from certain outside forces. The pathological disorders were very much conspicuous in his behaviour. Out of panic, he became speechless and his thoughts were disrupted. He seemed to suffer from a certain trepidation that “people outside were either throwing stones or firing at the train. (6)

However, his behavioural pattern changed drastically as he learned that the train was finally approaching Amritsar after crossing Harbanspura. The frail-looking, timid Babu suddenly screamed in excitement and shouted repeatedly that “We have arrived in Amritsar!” (9) There was a sudden change in his personality, and unexpectedly, he began to retort to the Pathans: “Come down, you bastard! You son of a bitch!... May your mother....” (9) This sudden change in his mood/behaviour can be analyzed with the help of Psychoanalysis. To consolidate his fractured *self*, the Babu was certainly looking for a denominator in his subconscious mind that would allow him to preserve his ‘imagined’ species formation. As the event of the kicking off of the couple by the Pathans flashed upon his mind, he began identifying himself along with the communal/ religious identity. The falsifying of the *ego* would give him a kind of permissive logic to perpetrate violence upon the ‘other’ to regain his lost/fractured identity.

As the train slowly arrived at the Amritsar station and the overcrowded platform “was buzzing with talk about the riots” (10), the Babu mysteriously disappeared and came later on with a lethal weapon in his hand only to see that the Pathans had left the compartment. (10) He roared: “The sons of bitches...they have all escaped....” (10) The frail-looking Babu suddenly became so fierce that nobody really dared to talk to him in a casual tone anymore. He was very much gripped with communalism and fanaticism and became so agitated that he could not sleep anymore. Almost all the potential symptoms of ASD like sleeplessness, uncontrollable rage, restlessness, irritability could be seen in him.

Towards the end of the story, the Babu was finally able to satisfy his *ego* by avenging the life of an innocent Muslim old man, who was merely pleading to open the door of the compartment. The Babu initially, remained indifferent to his repeated pleas “Open the door! In the name of Allah, open the door! (11), but opened the door abruptly and hit him on his head with the same iron rod surprisingly. The dying man's face was looking for an answer to this act. His female companion too couldn't grasp the logic and fell on the platform at once. There was no apparent reason why the Babu had hit him suddenly. The possible explanation one could offer was the widespread communal frenzy that allowed him to regain his lost identity and to fulfill his aggressive, annihilatory desire only by inflicting pain upon the ‘communal body’ (Misri 36) of the rival community. What would happen to him next after that impulsive murder? Would he remorse or become re-traumatized? The

story remains absolutely open-ended to such possibilities. The only clue we get is that the Babu threw his weapon outside the door after his reverie broke down and he looked vacant as if he had overcome from his trance. Communal antagonism was so pervasive during the Partition that it turned countless innocent victims into brutal murderers.

### III

In the early 2020s, a host of Indian psychiatrists like Alok Sarin, Sarah Ghani and Sanjeev Jain have tried to explore the psychological roots of the Partition induced trauma. In an essay called “Bad Times and Sad Moods,” they claim that: “abrupt and sudden dislocations, loss of social rootedness and exposure to social unrest have all been identified as causes of trauma.” (Butalia 249) In the story, “Mujhe Mere Ghar Le Chalo” (Take Me Home),<sup>2</sup> we find a protagonist, who, like the millions of other dislocated refugees suffers from the Partition induced psychological trauma. Much like Bhisani Singh in Manto’s “Toba Tek Singh”, the pathological neurosis comes in the victim due to the “abrupt and sudden dislocation” from his homeland and the resultant loss of his “social rootedness.”

The story describes a similar kind of train journey with a train full of refugees waiting at the overcrowded station of Wazirabad. As there was scorching heat, the passengers became very much thirsty but nobody really risked getting down at the station to fetch some drinking water due to the dread of an imminent riot that may occur at any time targeting any particular community. However, an old man who was dying of thirst, boarded down at the station to drink some water. As the train suddenly began to move, the old man, not knowing what to do, made “a wild rush” (2) to catch the train. Luckily, he was able to reach the compartment and climb up into the running train but got somehow physically wounded. His knees were bruised and “drops of blood oozed from where his chin had grazed the floor of the compartment.” (2) His fellow passengers then felt pity for him and offered him a little bit of water to drink. Some of them tore off a rag from his turban to wipe “the blood off his chin.”(2) But the old fellow remained absolutely indifferent to all the physical injuries as if he was possessed by something else. It took no time for the passengers to understand that he was undergoing a certain sort of psychological pain, which was so heavy on him that he hardly cared about his physical damages. He took no notice of his bruised knees or bleeding chin. His relatives might have already departed by the previous train. One is not sure about the whereabouts of his family or in which condition were they. Certain chaotic thoughts hurdled together in his mind and he remained absolutely silent. The only repetitive babble that he could utter was to take him to his home. (3) The passengers in the compartment could not make out his confusing, continuous jabber. They started questioning him:

But where is your home? What are you talking about, sir? No one has a home any more. Where shall we take you? (3)

The old man absolutely paid no attention to their queries and continued to babble the same thing again and again. The other passengers suspected that possibly, he was out of his head.

(3) After a few moments, shaking his head repeatedly, the old fellow suddenly shouted “In Miyani. Miyani, district Shahpur” (3) to which the other passengers got infuriated and started shouting at him. One of the passengers yelled:

So we should take you to Miyani now, should we? ...Are you in your right mind? Here we are, homeless and knocking about from place to place and here you are, missing your blessed Miyani. Want to go there and sit in your mother's lap, do you? (3)

The old man didn't mind their retorts at all. On the contrary, he shook his head frantically and sobbed "like a little child" (3) repeating the same cry "Take me home." (3) One could understand the intensity of the psychological pain that he was undergoing due to the forced relocation. Like millions of the other migrants, this old fellow too had become so traumatized due to the division and the undesired post-partition migration that he couldn't make any sensible activity. It took no time for the other passengers to understand that "he was really out of his mind" (4) since he was repeating the same words repeatedly.

However, an old woman, who was sitting nearby and witnessing everything, suddenly approached the old man and spoke something in Multani dialect, which was, of course, unintelligible to most of the passengers. Listening to these words, the old frantic fellow "suddenly became quiet. He opened his eyes. His head shaking, for a long time he gazed at the face of the old woman" (4) and suddenly mumbled:

*Miyani vasjaso? Main tuhanoo lai vajna?* ('You want to go to Miyani? Shall I take you there?') (4)

This turned a bit therapeutic for the old man, who suddenly woke up from his deep-rooted malady of the mind. The passengers understood that both of them were speaking in the same dialect. (4) The old man, who was behaving hysterically so far, suddenly broke down to tears looking at the old woman and replied to her in the same dialect:

*O Rabba dadiya! Mainu kitthe liya suttiya ee* ('O Lord! Where have you gone and flung me?') (4)

His loud sobbing can be taken as a way out for releasing the repressed trauma that he was carrying all the way. It is through the linguistic associations of the Multani dialect, he could ease out the trauma and agony buried within. This event may be taken as the Freudian 'return of the repressed' which suggests that it is through revisiting the past, repressed memory of a certain traumatic events, one may get cured or at least released from the subdued trauma. Towards the end of the story, the fellow passengers understood that he was not really "gone out of his mind", rather disturbed by the unexpected and chaotic events of Partition and its resultant forced dislocation.

#### IV

Partition-induced violence and its traumatic aftermath led to different kinds of psychological disorders in the individuals as well as in the collective masses. The pathological symptoms found in the victims of Sahni's stories were predominantly caused by the territorial anxiety created out of the filthy game of Partition. Traumatized subjects like the Babu or the old man inescapably bore the burden of a blotted history that they really never deserved. Their traumatic/ psychological disorders like those of millions of others were not simply the maladies of the mind or the unconscious selves, rather symptomatic of a turbulent history. Victims like the Babu or the old man became the "symptoms of history" itself. (Caruth, *Trauma* 5) Whereas the old fellow in "Take Me Home" carried the psychological trauma of being uprooted from his homeland, the Babu in "The Train Has

Reached Amritsar”, on the other hand, suffered from the victim-turned-perpetrator syndrome, which was quite common in the wake of Partition violence. Both of their maladies can be classified under the DSM – 5 (The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) taxonomical tool. Whereas the abrupt hyperarousal disarray and its associated disorders like hypervigilance, panic, sleeplessness, avoidance complex, etc. can be categorized as the Sub-threshold Trauma or more prominently, Acute Stress Disorder (ASD); the belated experiences of the traumatized, dislocated old man can be seen as part of the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) with its related disorders like the Repetitive Compulsive Disorder (RCD) or the Emotionally Unstable Personality Disorder (EUPD). In conclusion, it can be said that the short partition fiction of Bhisham Sahni (along with certain other stories of partition) offer us a new territory of ‘Partition Trauma Fiction’ within the existing domain of Partition Literature or Partition Studies.

### Notes

The text of “Amritsar Aaa Gaya” (The Train Has Reached Amritsar) is translated by Alok Bhalla and taken from the anthology called *Crossing Over: Partition Literature from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh*. eds. Frank Stewart and Sukrita Paul Kumar, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007. 2The text of “Mujhe Mere Ghar Le Chalo” (Take Me Home) is translated by Harish Trivedi, appeared in the anthology *Bruised Memories: Communal Violence and the Writer*. Ed. Tarun K. Saint. Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2000.

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**History and Polemics: Contesting Historiography in Githa Hariharan's  
*In Times of Siege***

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*Abstract*

*Polemics and literature have become inextricably linked in modern times, with one overlapping the other. Githa Hariharan has unearthed the ways through which polemics encroaches upon historical sanctity and ethics, eventually perpetuating an alternate history—a history which is controlled, contained and which glorifies a particular political or religious group. The act results in politicization of history. The purpose is to examine such politicization and its effects upon this discipline. Also, Hariharan's polemicist, an arbiter of unrest and violence, controls the grand-narrative rendering the minority group at the receiving end of the discourse. The paper attempts to explore the ways in which historical truth gets compromised, contrived, appropriated through polemics, actuating suffering of subalterns. The analysis seeks to unveil the polemical war between historical scholarship and religion and how polemic lays siege on "History" resulting in hegemonisation of historical knowledge.*

*Keywords: Polemics, Historiography, Discourse, Minority History, Fundamentalism*

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## **Introduction**

History and its representation in literature have acquired a contentious position in the postmodern era. Writers of postmodern historical fiction like Orhan Pamuk, Hilary Mantel, have experimented with the genre of historical fiction introducing varied postmodern themes and elements to render it pertinent to contemporary literary sensibility. The genre has also experienced 'intrusion', where history has often been distorted in the name of poetic license. However, several writers employ history and historical material as a reforming praxis in fiction. Githa Hariharan's *In Times of Siege*, delineates how history can reform, regulate the collective consciousness. She underlines multiple perspectives one fosters in contemporary times about history. Historiography is intensely explored, and the battles confronted by a historian form the narrative of her novel. The primacy of a historian's position is rightly stressed by E.H Carr in his work, *What is History*, "...when we take up a work of history, our first concern should be not with the facts which it contains but with the historian who wrote it" (22). Amidst multiple predicaments encountered by a historian—both existential and epistemological, the novel simultaneously concentrates on the intrusion of 'polemics' within history writing.

The word borrowed from French *polemique* - controversial; Greek *polemikos* connoting 'warlike' is deconstructed by Foucault (Polemic). Michel Foucault in an interview

titled, “Polemics, Politics, Problematizations” elucidates its various dynamics, “Polemics defines alliances, recruits partisans, unites interests or opinions, represents a party; it establishes the other as an enemy, an upholder of opposed interests against which one must fight until the moment this enemy is defeated and either surrenders or disappears” (Foucault 382). To involve in polemic is, to declare war against an idea and those nurturing that idea. Originally, only religious ideas fell under its umbrella but the term underwent a semantic change in the modern era and now entails an attack on any sort of idea. In a polemical discourse, the search for truth is unimportant rather it is the precedence of one argument over the other, with a singular thought imposed as the only feasible and absolute thing. Naturally, a polemicist practices selective representation, distortion and fabricates charges against its counterpart. Thus, it’s indispensable to identify such invasion manifest within historiography and simultaneously safeguard history’s encroachment by such ideological truth. “Arguably, abuses by historians always damage historiography, because historiography is a collective enterprise in which society has an interest” (De Baets 25).

*In Times of Siege* is a campus novel of sorts that explores the metamorphosis of a distance education history professor from his bland, sedentary life to a redeemer of ‘history’- a counternarrative to the canonical Hindu past. Shiv Murthy employed in Kasturba Gandhi Central University, is suddenly shaken from his bubble of complacent life, when a lesson prepared by him on the twelfth century poet, reformer and revolutionary, Basava, is subjected to intense criticism by a group named “Itihas Suraksha Manch”- religious extremists acting as self proclaimed historians. The group rejects Shiv’s version as an illustration of historical revisionism. Irish critic Desmond Fennell explains revisionism as “both in its ultimate thrust, and as a matter of objective fact, the historiography of the counter-revolution” (Gkotsaridis 726). They proclaim the alleged chapter jeopardizes the glorious Hindu past by depicting upper castes of Kalyana as perpetrators of caste discrimination. The professor is accused of sabotaging the identity of the medieval saint, misrepresenting him as a revolutionary battling caste hierarchy. Carr cites Bury’s proclamations on the problematic nature of documenting medieval history, “the records of ancient and medieval history are starved with lacunae” (13). Shiv has tried to address this lacunae in Basava’s erstwhile depictions by pseudo historians. Consequently, the polemical war is against Shiv’s idea of Basava and those espousing the selfsame version.

## **History Polarized**

The text unveils rampant religious polarization with the academia and political groups helming the two sides of historical discourse. The contradictions exist primarily between Shiv- a liberal professor, historian and the sectarian group. It is accentuated by different opinions stemming from and functioning amidst, the Head of Department and Shiv; Meena and Shiv; Shiv and the manch leaders; Shiv and Rekha etc. These multiple voices conflate to intensify the dialectical enterprise in the text, simultaneously evoking an illusion of reaching unadulterated truth. Nonetheless, the debate transforms from dialectics to polemics, tacitly uncovering the encroachment of fundamentalism and propaganda percolating from academia into contemporary public sphere.

Polemics operates at two levels in the text. The first pertains to, “Polemics of history”- the entire rhetoric, argument around the discipline amongst multiple social setups like political, religious organizations, media houses, various university fraternities etc pan India; the second, displays the Manch operational as “polemicists”, when they deprecate their historical account attributing it the colour of polemic. The debate divulges the epistemological roots of this discipline, raising corresponding questions about the act of writing history, which Hariharan implores to be bereft of social, moral, political affiliations and actuate establishment of absolute truth. She punctuates the profoundness of the term, historian-“something of a touchstone, an ideal” (17).

Dr Arya, Shiv’s colleague; a befitting adversary; a spokesperson of Itihas Suraksha Manch, initiates and fuels the controversy around Shiv’s chapter. The head of the department insinuates at a healthy dialogue regarding their respective historical positions. Dr Arya, however inexorably pushes his own religious narrative. He advocates the inclusion and propagation of ‘an alleged passage’, where the Muslims, Christians and Parsis are denounced as “foreigners” by a pamphleteer turned historian. Hariharan critiques such relegation, primarily of an individual’s identity, to a religious one. She underscores this denigration of protean human character to a homogenous entity where a singular, communal identity invalidates all other dimensions- linguistic, social, ethnic, economic etc. This deliberation in the beginning acts as a presage to the polemical discourse which emerges subsequently.

### **From Safe History to Authentic Historiography**

The scope of history as a field is restricted to chronicling of dates signifying rise and fall of kings; describing piety and enlightenment of saints. In short, promising to its readers, a “Safe history” which evades debates and controversies. Resultantly, what is expected of Shiv is an expurgated construct of Basava, epitomizing merely saintliness and spirituality. Basically a reductive approach towards the subject where one dimension of Basava is erased, appropriated and made more conducive to the demands of the Manch. The act suffices as an instance of blatant polemical distortion of history. Shiv’s father voices the complexity of maintaining a balance between safe history and true history. “You must mine the truth. If you settle for safety, if you choose to go along with whatever makes your life comfortable, truth will escape you completely” (Hariharan 82).

### **The Polemical Narrative**

The polemics around Basava’s chapter proceeds in a manner that it obstructs the common folk from comprehension of truth. Carr has opined “The picture of medieval man as devoutly religious, whether true or not, is indestructible, because nearly all the known facts about him were preselected for us by people who believed it, and wanted others to believe it...” (14). His pronouncements are mirrored in the actions of Itihas Suraksha Manch whose immediate rejoinder to Shiv’s chapter is, “We will not allow our history to be polluted like this. Fifty years after independence, we cannot have Indian historians brainwashed by foreign theories and methods depriving us of our pride in Hindu temple and priests” (Hariharan 76). They challenge any transgression against their own line of thought, leaving



no scope for an alternative discourse to flourish, let alone survive. Shiv is targeted until he renounces his historical proclamations about Basava.

A polemical debate, thereby becomes less an equal discussion and more a deliberate enforcement; less a dialogue between equals; more a hierarchical slavery. The polemical attitude of the Manch leaders is deftly explained, “Now, in 2000, the distance between the imaginary lands of literature and the prosaic city of history has shrunk. All occupy the same beleaguered space, the same territory under indefinite siege...the manch and its cohorts are telling them all that there is only one way to remember a great man, there way. Only one way to remember the past” (Hariharan 110). In a polemical debate, the attacker uses a lot of defamatory terms for his subject or counterpart. Shiv is paralleled to the likes of Muhammad Ghazni, Ghoris, assailants who ravaged, destroyed Indian heritage and opulence. He is declared an “Invader”, in the guise of a historian. Therefore, the discourse of polemics does not restrict to history alone, it drags, questions and challenges Shiv’s nationality for upholding a particular historical narrative.

Polemic hegemony is manifested at three levels: retraction of Shiv’s chapter-physical control; the lesson recalled from students- ideological control; the rewritten lesson sent to the group for approval- control of narrative or ‘discourse’. Foucault opines “Every point in the exercise of power is a site where knowledge is formed” (Miller 117). In the rhetoric, the polemicist operates from a position of power while his counterpart from a powerless vantage point. The Manch leaders reduce Shiv’s existence from an authorial entity to a helpless pariah, ostracized both professionally and publicly. The motive is to project their narrative as historical knowledge, Shiv’s ‘a myth’. Paradoxically, this exposes the exclusionary nature of their discourse. The ostensible lesson sparks cases of dissent, yellow journalism and hate mails censuring the professor’s credibility as a historian; as a responsible citizen. In short his worth as an individual is scrutinized, maligned and questioned for propagating inclusive history. “In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault argues that modern society is a ‘disciplinary society’,” suggesting that power in our time is largely ascertained through disciplinary means in a variety of institutions like schools, universities, militaries (*Power/Knowledge*). Manch aims to discipline and school historical consciousness within the academic discourse. The module poses a threat because it is visualized as an ideology carving institution which would influence the psyche of its readers, and make them a victim of what Althusser calls Ideological State Apparatus. Louis Althusser contends that state power is maintained via repressive structures functional through external force (Barry 158). The manch acts as repressive apparatus using direct force in form of mob lynching, public protest, censorship etc and exercises ideological control by subverting authentic past and replacing it with, religiously motivated narrative. Antonio Gramsci’s hegemony uncovers the politics behind such academic control (Barry 158). Hariharan displays ‘history writing’ as coercive with the discipline being hegemonised by non historians. The intrusion is physical and influences the schemata of readers eventually shaping the discourse around a manipulated past. Gramsci’s concept of hegemony; Althusser’s repressive state apparatus helps to discover control of such knowledge within society, which in this case is normalised by entities like pressure groups resulting in eventual internalisation of such politically motivated historical knowledge.

The chapter of history constantly under the radar, inspected for aberrations, discrepancies foregrounds the mechanism of surveillance upheld by pressure groups to control the lives of common people. Foucault's notion of "Panopticon establishment" finds resonance within the functioning of aforementioned group who exercise intimidation, to inform people that they are vulnerable to surveillance and hence can be branded an anti-national any time, depending on the kind of historical discourse they nurtured (Foucault, 205).

### **Good Histories and Bad Histories**

Minority history which gained prominence around 1960s has been the driving force of the dialectics perpetuated in Hariharan's text. Dipesh Chakrabarty in "*Provincializing Europe*" suggests, "Minority histories as such do not have to raise any fundamental questions about the discipline of history. Practicing academic historians are often more concerned with the distinction between good and bad histories than with the question of who might own a particular piece of the past" (97). Hariharan constructs Shiv Murthy as a champion of minority history and Arya, Manch Leaders as propagators of established majority narrative. Hence, the polemics also encapsulates the tussle between peripheral and grand narratives. The grand narrative glorifying a singular caste and trivializing minority persecution establishes a void in the collective history of nation's past. Manch exercises direct control to subdue the minority narrative. Shiv is coerced to sketch Basava as devoid of sympathies for the minorities. The resultant image strips him from an influential revolutionary to a harmless entity, a mere saint, meant only to be eulogised for posterity. And a factual, rational enquiry is transformed into a political and ideological enterprise. This is actuated through thought policing eventually disseminating majority history unscathed. So we have, "In Foucault's perspective, what he calls the 'discourse of race war' or 'history of the race struggle' (Vinale 671); discourse of marginalised hero pitted against discourse of Hindutva.

Interestingly, the marginalisation of lower caste in chronicled past is euphemistically termed by Eric Hobsbawm, as 'bad history' (Chakrabarty 97). He explicates "bad history is not harmless history. It is dangerous. Good histories are supposed to enrich the subject matter of history and make it more representative of society as a whole" (Chakrabarty 97). This idea forms the crux of the debate in the novel. Hariharan's dual warring sides: one endorses 'Bad History,' and the other, sloganeers for 'Good History.' The history of Basava's followers, Veerashaivas - exposes the oppressive structure of caste inextricable to the 'untouchable' past. Manch members envisage it a threat to their sacrosanct mainstream history which absolves royalty and upper caste as persecutors. Chakrabarty postulates, that 'Bad histories', often give rise to bad politics (97). The polemical debate proceeds from the Manch issuing official statement to the media accusing Shiv Murthy of tampering the glorious Indian history to mudslinging with the professor labeled a foreign invader, culminating into defamatory harangue categorizing the historian's chapter as part of a deep-rooted conspiracy. The group's protest is never an instance of "motiveless malignity". The end is to voluntarily establish a subjective truth enshrouded in an ulterior motive.

The minorities rediscover their past through its presence in the professor's history. Given its inclusive nature, Shiv's historical excerpt on Basava qualifies as illustration of 'good history' (Chakrabarty 97). It also divulges their vulnerability in twenty first century

given their marginalisation continuum. Hariharan explains the metamorphosis of good from bad through the metaphor of meeting rivers. “Two rivers with different current and speed, meet to form a third one” (107). The idea is to advocate the coexistence of two cross currents simultaneously; the confluence of peripheral history with the mainstream Hindu past; a macrocosmic past accommodating multiple histories.

## Conclusion

A polemic can never have a pedagogic objective since it breeds from an insincere conception of truth. While historical truth about Basava is subverted by manch, it’s upheld by Shiv. He takes pain to understand Basava’s psyche and reveal the same to his students thus advocating a free thinking position he always strove to achieve. “It is time to take stock. Shiv is now a living, contesting historian” (Hariharan 193). Or as Carr puts it, “The great historian - or perhaps I should say more broadly, the great thinker - is the man who asks the question ‘Why?’ about new things or in new contexts” (87). Hariharan provides Shiv closure, thus disabling the polemical atmosphere from disintegrating him. She explains— “Even Shiv, despite a long record of lost opportunities, has found his way to the brink...He has used his father’s memory like a walking stick en route to this first time risk-taking venture...Now the stick is superfluous...Once he throws away all the safe crutches, he can truly walk in the present. Be free to be curious, to speculate; to debate, to dissent. Reaffirm the value of the only heirloom he needs from the past, the right to know a thing in all the ways possible” (194).

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## A Postmodern Reading of Amrita Mahale's *Milk Teeth*

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### *Abstract*

*The arrival of the postmodern approach to the existing literary scenario announced several principles in exact contrast to its antecedent and counterpart, modernism. Scepticism about Truth, History, God and anything considered as authoritative or meta, subversion, critique of age-old notions and beliefs are the favourites of the theory. In line with these, this paper will focus on the postmodernist aspects as reflected in Amrita Mahale's debut novel, Milk Teeth (2018). The prime concern is to identify and foreground postmodernist features such as the reversal of the traditional form of history writing by the incorporation of fictional elements, unique narrative style that breaks conventions, defiant characters and critique age-old notions. The ideas of writers as E.H. Carr, Linda Hutcheon and Judith Butler will be used to support and fortify the line of argument.*

*Keywords : history, fiction, critique, sexuality, postmodernism*

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The term postmodernism includes a wide range of theories that provide its meaning. It is sometimes considered as a controversial theory considering the quality and extent of the influence on literature, art and other fields. The following quote makes clear the position of postmodernism:

In the avalanche of articles and books that have made use of the term since the late 1950s, postmodernism has been applied at different levels of conceptual abstraction to a wide range of objects and phenomena in what we used to call reality. Postmodernism, then, is several things at once. It refers, first of all, to a complex of anti-modernist artistic strategies which emerged in the 1950s and developed momentum in the course of the 1960s (Bertens 3).

There are some basic features that mark this theory. Linda Hutcheon is known for her views on one of the most significant characteristics: metafiction. Metafiction is a state where fact and fiction combine to challenge the traditional form of history writing and self – consciously refers to the process. The reason for this is because we see “history as a text, a discursive construct” (Hutcheon 142). In addition, Doctorow believes that, “history is kind of fiction in which we live and hope to survive, and fiction is a kind of speculative history...by which the available data for the composition is seen to be greater and more various in its sources than the historian supposes” (qtd. in Hutcheon 112).

Dr. Mahitosh Mandal's article “Ten features of Postmodernism” explains this feature:

Postmodern literature is marked by metafictionality, involving self-referentiality. Metafiction is a narrative that does not simply tell a story but punctuates the very act of story-telling by blurring the binary of fact/fiction, ... (1).

The reference to metafictionality becomes extremely significant since the novel blurs the distinction between fact and fiction, though not self – consciously.

The novel under scrutiny bears proof of the fact that history and fiction could be combined. The novel recounts the story of Irawati Kamat and Kartik Kini embedded within the framework of tying the past and present of Bombay/ Mumbai together. It takes us back to the events of nineties in Mumbai's history. By placing fictional characters alongside historical events, the story revolves around a community of people living together in a dilapidated building known as Asha Nivas. The building is situated in Matunga, in the heart of Mumbai, and the story opens with the residents deliberating on the state of the building and the necessary measures that need to be taken. In the course of solving this conflict, the novel takes us through the modern/redeveloped city and throws light on the major historical events of the past.

There are at least two remarkable historical events that unfold as the plot progresses. One is the depiction of the plague in 1896, which shook the lives of people in the city. The novel describes this event by referring to Ira's ex-boyfriend Kaiz, whose doctoral studies focus on the Bombay Improvement Trust, a body formed by the Britishers, the then rulers of the country, to develop the city after the plague (Mahale 137). History has it that the plague originated in China and spread to India through naval trade routes. Mumbai was the epicentre of the plague and countless people died due to the unavailability of medicines and the severity of the disease (Fernando 1).

E.H. Carr in *What is History?* deals with the process of probing the answer to what history actually is. After deliberating on the subject, he concludes that history is a relation between the historian and facts and a dialogue between the past and present (32). In addition, about individuals, he says:

...is a dialogue not between abstract and isolated individuals, but between the society of today and the society of yesterday. ...The past is intelligible to us only in the light of the present; and we can fully understand the present only in the light of the past. To enable man to understand the society of the past, and to increase his mastery over the society of the present, is the dual function of history (32).

The novel depicts two fictional characters who create the link between the past and present and constantly engage in the dialogue between the two. The major historical event is the portrayal of communal riots involving the Babri Masjid issue. Ira and Kaiz, two fictional characters who had been lovers at that point in time, are witnesses of the riot and the subsequent bomb blasts. The novel traces the communal conflict through the words of a Hindu taxi driver who swells up with contempt as he hears the sound of *namaz* and interestingly, vocalises his feelings to Kaiz and Ira who travel in his taxi. He says: "Who do they think they are, with these blaring noises five times a day? Is the city the property of their fathers?" (Mahale 115). He then blatantly declares it was them (the Hindus) who tried twice to attack Kaiz's race (Mahale 115). According to history, the mosque in Ayodhya was demolished on December 6, 1992 by 'kar sevaks' who claimed that an ancient Ram temple stood at the same site ([www.thehindu.com](http://www.thehindu.com)). And the novel points out the way by which Muslims took revenge:

There were thirteen bomb blasts over the next hour and a half. Five days after Holi, the streets were painted scarlet, drenched in glass and shrapnel, bones and limbs...  
 ... It was a revenge attack after all, and the perpetrators were safely hiding in Pakistan and Dubai. But Bombay was tired, Bombay was battered already, and the cycle of an eye for an eye did not continue. For mostpractical purposes, the communal violence that started after the Babri Masjid fell came to an end after the blasts. But there were other casualties (Mahale 114-118).

The event described above is significant since it is from here that the lives of Ira and Kaiz take a turn. Ira and Kaiz who feature as passionate lovers till this time, slowly begin to drift apart. The reason is Kaiz's disapproval of the ways in which Bombay treated 'his boys' the term he uses to refer to his Muslim brothers (Mahale 107). He ends a year long relationship with his lover as he feels he does not belong to the city, a fact that he proclaims when both meet after years of separation (Mahale 162).

Human beings are not only the most complex and variable of natural entities, but they have to be studied by other human beings, not by independent observers of another species...The sociologist, the economist, or the historian needs to penetrate into forms of human behaviour in which the will is active, to ascertain why the human beings who are the object of his study willed to act as they did (Carr 42).

The archives or the historical documents might be silent on the causes of this event or the after effects suffered by innumerable people due to this event. The fictional account provided gives a detail of one of the many such episodes that would have been faced by the people of India.

One more characteristic of postmodernism according to Jean Lyotard is that it is marked by its "incredulity towards metanarratives" (xxiv). As against the metanarrative of the historical event, this fictional account proves to be a micro narrative of Ira and Kaiz. These characters are represented as the victims of riots, if not directly. They provide the link between the contemporary society and that of the yester year and serve as portrayals of the consequences of such an historical event. Maybe, it is this facet of history – fiction combination that Kaiz believes in and puts forth in one of his conversations with Ira:

What do you mean *proper* history—what's in the textbooks? History is not just names, dates and events, you know? That's just the skeleton. Stories are the flesh and blood, the link between past and present. That's the reason we study history after all (Mahale 99).

To add to this is E.H. Carr's view is that,

Scientists, social scientists, and historians are all engaged in different branches of the same study: the study of man and his environment, of the effects of man on his environment and of his environment on man. (52).

The Babri Masjid event and the effects of the same on the environment and the society is stated through the lives of Ira and Kaiz. The conflict between the Muslims and Hindus and each affecting the other's environment is clearly brought out through these characters and their actions.

E.H.Carr also states that:

The study of history is a study of causes. The historian, as I said at the end of my last lecture, continuously asks the question 'Why?'; and so long as he hopes for an answer, he cannot rest (53).

History might have just narrated the event rather than deciphering the causes of such an event. Fictional lives of Ira and Kaiz make us understand the socio, political conditions of our country in the past and also brings to light the manner in which the political affects the personal.

In addition to this is yet another feature of postmodernism. According to Hutcheon it is: "The contradictory nature of postmodernism involves its offering of multiple, provisional alternatives to traditional, fixed unitary concepts in full knowledge of (and even exploiting) the continuing appeal of those very concepts" (60).

Apart from creating a fact-fiction bond which gives away its postmodern characteristic, the novel has not failed to incorporate characters who question and break conventions and age - old notions. The characters explained here, are both considered the margins of the society: one is a woman and the other is a gay. Through their actions, they challenge the notion of a center and views normally considered sacred and celebrate their differences. Irawati Shankar Kamat, the heroine of the story. Born into an orthodox brahmin family to Mrs. Shobha and Mr. Shankar Kamat, she works as the beat reporter on the Bombay Municipal Corporation (BMC) for a newspaper. Her revolt and rebellion begins at a rather early age. As she plays with friends from the community of Asha Nivas, she questions some elderly boys when they tease her. It is specifically pointed at Kartik Kini, her best friend, and herself. At a time when Kartik decides to keep his mouth shut, her outpour of feelings in English (something that was not very common in the 1990's), makes everyone spellbound: "Do you even have a house to go to, or do you sleep on the road? ... Why don't you answer, don't you understand what I am saying? No? You don't speak English? No English? You *poor, poor* boys!" (Mahale 25).

This extends to the period she embraces adulthood and can be seen in her attitude to turn down the proposal of Vinay Prabhu whose mother could not accept the fact that she is not ready to taste brinjal even after the multiple attempts of persuasion (Mahale 39). In addition, she becomes a voice for the voiceless and her role as the beat reporter helps her achieve this. She makes an assessment of the areas of Bandra and Santa Cruz, which normally get flooded during monsoon. She undertakes a visit to these areas as the Municipal has done no pre monsoon work and wants to cover it in one of her articles. A contractor had been signed two months ago but he stopped midway (Mahale 42). Moreover, in Andheri East in the place of seventy labourers, only ten were being used (Mahale 42). The residents say that they face a lot of hardships during the monsoon (Mahale 42).

Also, the reality concerning the city and the attitude of the people can be seen in the following lines: "The big stories appeared to be in hiding... These scams enraged them, and from the crucible of their fury, they themselves emerged pure" (Mahale 43). She also undertakes to expose a multi-crore scam involved in the buildings and factories department of BMC for which she receives acclaim (Mahale 38). Ira herself comments about her work saying: "I know then that what I do is more than the sewers and scams I write about. My work feels like a part of a long arc that bends towards an answer to that fundamental question: how should our society be?" (Mahale 244). Her victory is also visible in the lines that follow: "After her report on storm-water drains, the BMC had started fining contractors for the delay in desilting. The fine of ten thousand rupees for each week of delay had earned the municipal corporation four lakhs already" (Mahale 55). And it is quite ironic that she has been asked to write a series on Mumbai to mark the country's fifty years of Independence



(Mahale 93). Thus she questions the age-old beliefs and authorities. The margin becomes the centre, according to the following quote:

...Blacks and feminists, ethnics and gays, native and “Third World” cultures, do not form monolithic movements, but constitute a multiplicity of responses to a commonly perceived situation of marginality and ex-centricity. And there have been liberating effects of moving from the language of alienation (otherness) to that of decentering (difference), because the center used to function as the pivot between binary opposites which always privileged one half: white/ black, male/female, self/other, intellect/body, west/east, objectivity/ subjectivity—the list is now well known. But if the center is seen as a construct, a fiction, not a fixed and unchangeable reality, the “old either-or begins to break down,” as Susan Griffin put it (1981, 1982, 291) and the new and-also of multiplicity and difference opens up new possibilities. (Hutcheon 62).

In line with this quote, is Kartik Kini, Ira's best friend and fiancé. Born to Ashok and Kusum Kini, Kartik proves to be a scholar, that is, people hail him as one. After turning down Ira's love proposal as a teenager, both of them meet after thirteen years of separation. Fate has it that both of them get engaged only for Kartik to write a letter to Ira's parents to call the wedding off. The reason is because he finds out through his spy, Pinkesh, that Ira goes to spend a weekend with her ex- boyfriend Kaiz. But the real factor, the one that makes him take the decision is that Kartik is well aware of his sexuality. He is a gay and has been in relationships with other men from the same community. Portrayed as a boy who does not have the courage to come out in front of his parents, Kartik feels all the more nervous to reveal the secret to his family. At a time when these were considered as taboo and earned people's disgust, Kartik finds it difficult to admit the choices that concern his sexuality. But that does not mean he succumbs to societal pressures.

Judith Butler, a postmodern feminist, says:

I sought to understand some of the terror and anxiety that some people suffer in “becoming gay”, the fear of losing one's place in gender or of not knowing who one will be if one sleeps with someone of the ostensibly “same” gender. This constitutes a certain crisis in ontology experienced at the level of both sexuality and language (1990 xi).

Though he is scared and feels guilty for deviating from what is considered ‘normal’, he gives way to his desires and avoids the marriage with Ira when he finds a reason to do so. His own mother's reaction to an article concerning gays, reveals the attitude of the people at that point in time: “Two men marrying? What is this new trend?” said his mother, squinting at the picture of a newly-wedded couple surrounded by rainbow balloons”... Good we did not move outside India,’ she said. ‘This is madness” (Mahale 234). His journey as a gay begins when he moves from Matunga to Powai in order to study computer science (Mahale 70). His usual activity involves him taking a bus to Andheri, and satisfying his desires with unknown men in the common toilet (Mahale 201). He initially thinks this is a sin and resolves never to indulge in it, only to find himself going to the same place every week (Mahale 201). He thus continues to be a gay after he calls off the wedding with Ira.

Finally, the feature of postmodernism with relevance to the novel is:

“The postmodern narrative not only problematizes the Aristotelian formula of a chronological and tripartite division of a plot (beginning, middle, and end);... (Mandal 2).

*Milk Teeth* goes against the chronological narrative by moving back and forth in time. In the first part which involves Ira and Kartik, one chapter goes back to the time when Kartik and Ira were children, while the other chapter talks about their present. For instance, chapter Seven deals with an episode where the mothers of the two children are seen to discuss the sayings of an astrologer which assured that Ira and Kartik are destined to get married to each other (Mahale 62). Chapter Eight deals with the present when Ira's parents deliver the happy news that Kartik's parents have asked for Ira's hand in marriage (Mahale 72). Chapter Ten describes the engagement ceremony of Ira and Kartik while simultaneously drawing our attention to the conversations and arguments that went on, before she gave her consent (Mahale 83).

Thus explained and explicated, Amrita Mahale's *Milk Teeth* is truly postmodern text in every sense of the term.

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**Violence for Self-respect: Quintessential Shillong in Dhruba Hazarika's  
*A Bowstring Winter***

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*Abstract*

*Set in the Northeast Indian city of Shillong, Dhruba Hazarika's novel A Bowstring Winter presents a unique character who maintains his self-respect by unleashing savage brutality on others, compulsively attacking those people who insult him. If Kharkongor remains peaceful whenever he feels disrespected, then it appears to damage his dignity. The present essay aims to scrutinise this peculiar aspect of his personality through an analytical perspective derived from theoretical works that establish a causal relationship between self-esteem and violence. In so doing, Kharkongor's thought-process would be exposed, a cognitive mechanism that deems it rational to injure others every time he detects a possibility of suffering humiliation. Further, this investigation seeks to accentuate the fiction's portrayal of Shillong's distinct socio-cultural tradition and the Khasi community's spiritual beliefs that dominantly impel Kharkongor to harm others for the sake of his amour propre.*

*Keywords: Northeast India, Shillong, Dhruba Hazarika, Self-respect, Violence*

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Dhruba Hazarika is one of the few Northeast Indian Anglophone authors endorsed by a reputed publishing company; thus, his literary works have gained a wide readership. As recognition for his storytelling brilliance, Hazarika was bestowed with the Katha award for fiction in 1996, and deservedly so because he weaves emotive narratives that meticulously capture the social, economic, cultural, and political intricacies specific to Northeast India. His latest novel *Sons of Brahma* (2014) fictionalises the particular period in Assam's history marred by insurgency. Hazarika portrays the protagonist Jongom Hanse unwittingly embroiled in the internecine conflict between the government security forces and militants. Jongom's predicament characteristically embodies the harrowing lives led by countless innocent Northeast Indians amidst the quotidian bloody confrontation. Hazarika's book of short stories *Luck* (2009) vividly represents the region's abundance of pristine nature, concurrently exploring human-animal encounters and relationships. Prominent newspapers have featured his writings, such as *The Telegraph* from Kolkata and Guwahati based *The Sentinel*. Hazarika is a founder-member of the North East Writers' Forum, a society of authors and poets from Northeast India.

Set in picturesque Shillong, Hazarika's first novel *A Bowstring Winter* (2006) depicts the lives of few pugnacious gangsters engaged in forcibly determining the outcome of an archery based lottery known as "Teer." It is a legal form of gambling rooted in the city's unique socio-cultural tradition and "guided by the belief that the winning numbers

appear in the dreams of players, who use a local system to translate images into numbers” (Sithlou). Conventional thinking would find it logical to attribute the mobsters’ violent disposition to their allegiance to a vicious criminal gang. Although plausible, however, promptly establishing such linkage appears to obfuscate the innocuous psychological processes that galvanise a dreaded thug named Kharkongor to hurt others. Intriguingly, the plot subtly portrays that if Kharkongor remains peaceful whenever he feels disrespected, then it appears to damage his dignity. By analysing this peculiar aspect of his personality, this study argues that Kharkongor kills a murderous assailant to bolster his self-respect exclusively. Protecting others from the attacker is merely ancillary to the intent of maintaining his self-esteem.

While conducting a philosophical inquiry into the concept of violence, the philosopher Slavoj Zizek posits that society generally commits an oversight by dominantly perceiving violent occurrence solely as a “perturbation of the ‘normal’, peaceful state of things” (2). Instead, Zizek introduces the concept of “objective violence” (2) and defines it as “violence inherent to this ‘normal’ state of things” (2). To put it differently, Zizek foregrounds that violence underpins some praiseworthy socio-cultural norms and conventions that society generally associates with nonviolence. Echoing Zizek’s logic, in his seminal book *Violence: Reflections on a National Pandemic*, James Gilligan propounds that a capacity for barbarity is latent in the admirable psychological incentive to uphold self-respect. He suggests that individuals who excessively prioritise maintaining their dignity react with unbridled rage whenever others disrespect them: “These personality traits, in my experience, the main motives for violence: the fear of shame and ridicule, and the overbearing need to prevent others from laughing at oneself by making them weep instead” (77). Similarly, Brad J. Bushman and Roy F. Baumeister together assert that not all arrogant humans resort to violence when insulted. Rather, they believe that “people who are emotionally invested in grandiose self-views are the most aggressive” (227). In other words, Bushman and Baumeister ascertain that narcissistic individuals invariably respond with aggression whenever they detect a challenge to their positive self-image. Following Zizek’s, Gilligan’s, and Bushman and Baumeister’s interlocking perspectives, this study will particularise the precise constituents of Kharkongor’s commendable self-respect for the sake of which he is willing to injure others without guilt or remorse.

The few insightful critical studies on the book curiously overlook the theme of violence evident in the plot. For instance, Miazhi Hazam’s essay scrutinises Hazarika’s portrayal of Shillong’s distinctive culture that dictates various characters’ interaction with their social and natural environment: “The local ethos is found in terms of locale, cuisine, values and nature – both human and the natural world” (57). Whereas, Kh. Kunjo Singh’s article spotlights the novel’s primary characters experiencing a mystic connection with Mother Nature: “The affinity of the tribal people with nature and sharing a deep ecological relationship with it is celebrated in many occasions. In many places in the novel ecomystical sentiments are heard” (36). Although ingenious and significant, the two systemic expositions do not address Kharkongor’s idiosyncratic association with violence. Therefore, to reiterate, this investigation attempts to expose Kharkongor’s inoffensive thought-process that paradoxically urges him to unleash violence on others to lead an honourable life.

In the novel, Kharkongor's sense of dignity appears to be hinged on his reputation as a peerless archer. In fact, his stature seems to be inextricably intertwined with his community, i.e., the Khasi indigenous ethnic group's theological beliefs: "[L]egend has it that archery was a gift from the gods to the Khasi people of this region. It was received by Ka Shinam (known locally as the 'reigning goddess'), who passed the divine bow and arrows to her sons U Shynna and U Batiton. The boys played with these weapons and became skilled marksmen over time" (Ramadurai). The Khasi people regard archery as a holy sport, and proficiency in it is considered a divinely bestowed skill. Customary rituals symbolically unify a newborn baby boy with archery; a blessed union that is to be maintained even in the afterlife:

[W]hen a boy is born, a naming ceremony known as *ka jer ka thoh* involves placing a bow and three arrows before the baby, indicating his role as a warrior and protector. The first arrow signifies his land, the second his clan and the third himself. Upon his death, the same bow is placed by the body, the weapon preserved safely inside his home since his birth, while the arrows are shot into the sky to accompany his soul to the heavens. (Ramadurai)

With archery occupying an exalted position within the Khasi's world, more so for the male members, Kharkongor appears to have ingrained the community's spiritual beliefs to the extent that his self-respect is directly proportional to his status as a celebrated archer. Other men from his community merely revere the sport, but Kharkongor seems to wholeheartedly perceive possessing archery skills as a divine duty, so much so that his favourable self-image is based on becoming unrivalled in it.

At this juncture, it is worth mentioning that Kharkongor's utter dependence on his supreme archery talent to uphold his self-respect is thematically similar to Okonkwo's, the protagonist of Chinua Achebe's widely acclaimed novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958). Both of them are extremely sensitive towards any challenge to their prestige. Kharkongor fears that someone else might undermine his standing as a matchless archer. On the other hand, Okonkwo dreads that if he, intentionally or otherwise, performs an action not expected of a stereotypical masculine individual, it would shatter his macho persona. At their core, Kharkongor and Okonkwo manifest unwillingness to compromise on their self-respect irrespective of the circumstance.

Reverting our attention to Hazarika's novel, other gangsters frequently praise Kharkongor's archery expertise, thereby engendering within him an addiction for their appreciation to maintain positive self-esteem. David Middleton would endorse the preceding statement's logic through his assertion that although people's amour propre is primarily conditional on their favourable opinion of themselves; however, social forces significantly mould it too: "Whilst we can take pride in our own achievements – a source of appraisal self-respect – we also look to others to affirm our achievements" (69). From this perspective, it stands to reason that Kharkongor's psyche regularly requires a healthy dose of approbation for his talent to reinforce his dignity. The nuanced operation of this socio-psychological phenomenon is noticeable when another gang member named Andrew compliments Kharkongor for his mastery in archery: "Bah Kharkongor is the best *teerman* in Shillong? Maybe in the whole of India" (35). Here, *teerman* is a colloquial term for an archer. Kharkongor modestly responds to the acclamation, "Ah, Andrew, your compliments do me much harm. It is because I begin to think I am the best that I have of late become much lazy"

(35). Andrew reasserts, “But it’s true. Bah Kharkongor is the greatest teerman, the best shot with the bow, that we know of” (35). At this moment, undoubtedly, Andrew’s acclamatory proclamation must have considerably boosted Kharkongor’s self-respect.

Additionally, Kharkongor maintains his archery skill above and beyond a personally instated standard; this strategy facilitates his effort to keep his prestige high. Regarding this logic, Thomas E. Hill Jr. posits that individuals lead a life of dignity by achieving their individualised criterion, falling short of which they suffer a loss of self-esteem: “The sort of personal standards and ideals on which one’s self-respect depends are typically seen as inescapably a part of oneself. Whether one sees them as objective or not, one genuinely takes the attitude that one is, in one’s own view, better or worse according to how one measures up to them” (22-23). Hill Jr. emphasises that such “personal standards or ideals” (23) function as “an important part of oneself” (23). Since he has committed himself to keep his ability top-notch for the sake of self-respect, Kharkongor ignores the ailment currently afflicting his body. Instead, he proclaims his dedication towards carrying out his daily routine designed to refine his competency with the bow and arrow: “Tomorrow I will shoot again even with the pain in my chest” (139). He reaffirms, “Tomorrow I will only shoot” (139). Kharkongor’s dedication manifests his fear that a dip in archery prowess would invariably translate into a prestige decline. Therefore, improving his proficiency with the bow and arrow takes precedence for Kharkongor over taking care of his deteriorating health.

Since his dignity is contingent on his standing as an expert archer, Kharkongor is vigilant against any potential threat to his reputation. Whenever he finds himself in a situation that could undermine his stature, it elicits a violent response. The plot cleverly portrays this aspect of Kharkongor’s personality when he accompanies his friend James and a few other thugs to sabotage rival gang’s activities. He is assigned to secure the perimeter and keep a lookout for signs of danger while James confronts the adversaries. Upon detecting an assailant sneaking up to ambush James, Kharkongor shoots an arrow and hits the attacker with pinpoint accuracy from a distance considered impossible in archery. At first glance, Kharkongor’s violent act seems to be guided by the heroic intention to protect his friend from certain death. However, he appears to have killed the aggressor primarily to live up to the position of a masterly archer, failing in which shame would have invaded his mind. This possibility is affirmed by the essay “Shame, Guilt, and Violence” in which James Gilligan suggests that “the basic psychological motive, or cause, of violent behavior is the wish to ward off or eliminate the feeling of shame and humiliation - a feeling that is painful and can even be intolerable and overwhelming - and replace it with its opposite, the feeling of pride” (1154). Accordingly, if Kharkongor had refrained from killing the assailant or had missed him, the eventual onslaught of shame on his mind would have severely dented his self-respect. Fortunately, Kharkongor’s violence and its outcome have rescued him from getting humiliated, thereby safeguarding his prestige.

Suppose someone argues that Kharkongor had intended to protect James exclusively and not to uphold his self-respect. In that case, this particular argument would be invalidated upon scrutinising Kharkongor’s violent action through the perspective provided by Julian Walker and Victoria Knauer. They together assert that a social dimension underpins people’s experience of shame when disrespected: “[T]he core issue is the negative down rating of the victim’s status particularly in relation to the person humiliating them or in relation to others present” (726). Further simplifying their uncomplicated assertion, Walker and Knauer add

that the “presence of observers” (726), whenever an individual is subjected to humiliation, serves to exacerbate the shame’s agonising effect on the same person, ultimately “leading to rage and violence in response” (726). Correspondingly, Kharkongor is conscious of other gangsters’ presence around him, making him surmise that he would undoubtedly face their scorn if he does not strike the attacker. Hence he eliminates the assailant through a dazzling display of his archery prowess. Therefore, Kharkongor’s violence is a preemptive exercise in removing all possibilities of experiencing shame and embarrassment, securing his self-respect in the process.

The thugs who have witnessed Kharkongor’s recent feat of archery unanimously acknowledge his unparalleled expertise. A character named John Dkhar notices the gang members presently venerating Kharkongor: “On the faces of the men beside him beamed a mixture of pride and humility. A sort of reverence that comes when one has seen something epic and inimitable” (48). Even John is in awe of Kharkongor’s sublime act of violence: “For as long as he lived, the image of the teerman, carved into a statue for that tiny fraction of second, would remain stamped in his memory” (48). He is unable to stop himself from heaping praises on Kharkongor’s brilliance: “It was a shot as close as one could come to defining as an act of genius” (48). The splendid shot becomes a topic for discussion in reverential tones among other gang members. One among them, Stanley Lyngdoh, asks John, “I heard the men talk of Bah Kharkongor’s shot. It was a very difficult shot” (57). John replies in the affirmative, “It was a classic shot” (57). He extols Kharkongor’s achievement, “To pick up the arrow, aim and shoot in less than a second and then to hit the man at that distance is something I’d never have believed if I had not been standing next to him” (57). Another thug named Andrew joins the conversation, visibly proud of having Kharkongor in their midst: “[D]id I not tell you he’s the greatest teerman in the whole of India?” (57). Evidently, Kharkongor’s violent act has exalted his reputation to mythic proportions, undoubtedly reinforcing his dignity.

Moreover, Kharkongor’s display of his archery excellence seems to have mesmerised John to the extent of making him frequently recall the particular event without conscious effort. Much later in the plot’s timeline, John discloses that Kharkongor’s talent has left him spellbound: “I still can’t believe how you managed to hit that man that day. It’s a shot that everyone talks about everyday. It was just great, Bah Kharkongor, just wonderful” (132). Predictably, Kharkongor is pleased because John has uttered those words that he desires to hear perpetually. In another instance, John reiterates his admiration for Kharkongor, whose skills have considerably declined because of poor health: “You’re still great, Bah Kharkongor. Your eyes have not dimmed and your hands are steady” (196). John proclaims that Kharkongor’s expertise is still unparalleled: “It was about as wonderful as that long shot in Umiam that day at the making. Oh, Bah Kharkongor but there’s none like you!” (196). John’s reverential statements must have undoubtedly reinvigorated Kharkongor’s self-respect. As is apparent, the genesis of John’s admiration lies in the exact moment when Kharkongor had eliminated the assailant.

The evidence forwarded in this investigation concretely establishes that Kharkongor’s sole motivation has been to uphold his self-respect while preemptively killing the murderous assailant. Protecting his friend James from harm did not figure in his mind despite all appearances to the contrary. Kharkongor’s laudable personality of putting a premium on his dignity has as its underside a callous willingness to go to great lengths, even

butcher others, to protect his prestige. While not all confident individuals would resort to violence when disrespected, Kharkongor's absolute reliance on his archery skills to maintain a positive self-image does not allow him to be non-combative upon detecting a challenge to his talent. In what is a testament to Hazarika's storytelling ability, the novel ingeniously utilises the Khasi community's spiritual beliefs and Shillong's unique gambling scene to conduct an inquiry into the psychological mechanism that compels an individual to be belligerent for the sake of self-respect.

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## **Ecofeminism in the English Poetry by Women of North East India: A Critique of Nitoo Das's Poems**

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### *Abstract*

*Ecological concerns are a dominant theme in North East English literature beyond the issues of insurgency, misogyny and racism. The study of poetry in this regard cannot be an exception. The paper begins from the praxis of study of language as a lexical marker of reading gendered codes and goes on to make a brief intersectional discussion on the poetry written in English by women from North East India, more specifically with its eco-feminist contours visibly represented in the three poem collections Boki, Cyborg Proverbs and Crowbite by Nitoo Das selected here for analysis. The poems from the first collection are subtly feministic in their undertone reverberating through food and folklore, the second collection is crisp with sharp imagery while the recent collection seeps in the ecological essence of North east in its natural richness and mystic galore which is the central focus of my paper.*

*Keywords: Northeast, Ecology, Feminist poetry*

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Women writers in different cultural set ups often confront and undermine the male traditions of the canon by producing works with encoded messages, works with surface designs that conceal deeper and more subversive messages and poetry often serves the abstract ground to decode the same. As Toril Moi notes, then, for Gilbert and Gubar “the female voice is duplicitous, but nevertheless true, and truly female voice.” (Wallace 229) The issue of language within feminist literary criticism has been studied from different radical perspectives. Some feminist critics interested in language have also worked to redefine what linguists, psychoanalysts, or literary critics mean when they examine language. Kristeva, for example, suggests that we shift our attention from language as a monolithic system, to language as a heterogeneous signifying process. (Wallace 230) Thus language can both oppress and liberate women in the spurning wheel of a patriarchal tradition that needs constant critical engagement and redefinition and a reading of Nitoo Das's poems definitely reveal the same in their feminist undertone. As her poem “Seven, eight –bodied” goes where her language of creative expression is at once exhilarating as well as ripe with susceptibility:

My language (the language  
I visit only in poems) pleases enough  
To slam shut eyes. Shakes bodies  
Like ageing leaves  
And infects everything around it. (*NELit review*, March, 2012)

North East is a land less known though not forbidden to the ‘mainland’ India. In the Introduction to the book, *Strangers of the Mist* journalist and writer Sanjay Hazarika rightly remarks, “As the sun raises in the North-East much of India sleeps.” Noted academic Tilotamma Mishra pins down appropriately in the introduction of *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from North-East India*: “The region known as the North-east has never had the privilege of being at the centre of occult knowledge associated with tantric worship, magic and astrology, and strangely enough, the imagination of the ‘mainland’ has even today not outgrown those construct of the mysterious other” (Mishra xii). The Ahom colonial policy of separating the hill and valley through ‘posa system’ which made a clear demarcation between plains and tribes still reverberates with contemporary significance. The sensitive issue of language amongst small ethnic groups and the linguistic chauvinism of the dominant ruling class e.g. the caste Hindu Assamese in case of Assam find an investigating concern in the critical narratives on the Northeast. The Assamese language in its various oral forms has also served as the *lingua franca* amongst many of the hill people in the neighbouring states of Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland. However, the oral forms of the languages have remained as pidgin languages and are therefore, termed as ‘non-language’ even by the speakers who use these forms of the language for communicating with people from the neighbouring tribes (Mishra xv). Tilotamma Mishra further notes that before the advent of identity politics amongst the various ethnic communities in the region whose mother tongue is not Assamese, the writers from different communities used the Assamese language as a medium for creative writing. As a result there was an infusion of language acquiring distinctive characteristics because of the overlapping of elements peculiar to the culture of the different indigenous communities (Mishra xv).

For writers like Nitoo Das the language of creative expression may be English but the mother tongue moulds the emotional vocabulary. Speaking of her debut collection of poems *Boki*, Das says:

Boki is taken from my poem *Doiboki*. In this poem, a woman’s name breaks into pieces, turns into a taunt, a song. In *Asomiya*, ‘to bok’ means to utter meaninglessly, almost crazily. (Dutta, 2010)

Nitoo Das’s poem “The Voiceless Velar Fricative” published in *NElit review*, March 11, 2012, is indicative of the gap between voice and anonymity as an identity that articulates silence in the national narrative of centrality of powers as well as the use of the aesthetics of the *Axomiya* language in her English poetry like other contemporary writers writing in English from Assam:

I am the x in oxomiya  
Xenduriya, xondhiya  
Xonjiboni. Very few can voice me (*NElit review*, March, 2012)

The North east is abundant with poets who prefer to write in English which is not their mother tongue but a second language mainly because of their education. This once again reaffirms Raja Rao’s famous statement in the preface of *Kanthapura* that Indian writers use English not as a language that they own but as a cultural spirit that they own. Tilotamma Mishra rightly puts it that these poets have “effectively combined the music, rhythm and patterns of their own languages and cultures with the forceful communicative power of the English language.” (Mishra vi) It is noteworthy to mention here that some of the best creative writings from the region have been produced in acquired languages including

English. Though it comes as a set back to the grand political narrative of regionalism and linguistic nationalism mainly in Assam, this new band of writers mostly young are growing increasingly as the number of English medium school goers is increasing and the hill states have included English as their official language ensuring that it would be the first language of the upcoming generation of literates. The poetry of the region reflects the many cultural encounters that happened right from the Bhakti movement, other reformist moves, and the reign of the colonizers and the role of missionaries spreading westernization and the English language and the continuing insurgent political turmoil of an ethnic war zone. Images, metaphors, myths and folklore reflective in the poems are drawn from the different linguistic communities of the region enriching the poet's imaginative rhetoric. Mamang Dai, author of *River Poems* in her article "North East Poetry" in *Muse India* brings out the double-edged aspect of poetry by saying that "we wade through gutted entrails slippery with blood, and we run through the green bamboo crushing earthworms and frogs, living amidst death and resurrection all at the same time" (Dai, 2006). In a similar vein talking about the deep rooted insurgency issue and gender politics in North east, poet Nabina Das in an article on North east poetry cites the example of Mizo poet Mona Zote's strong poetry that speaks of the body of women, of bloodshed and the desire to reimagine the conflict her state has faced long. (Das, . Rini Barman in an article on North eastern women poets explores the dark underbelly of "sexual militancy" reflective in the poetry by women from this region (Barman, 2014). She cites the example of Uddipana Goswami's *Green Tin Trunk* as a survivor's testament that charts the progress of a kind of "domestic militancy." Uddipana's earlier poems from *We Called the River Red* takes a subversive stand against the traditionally victimized heroines of Assamese folktales where she challenges the male-dominated ethos that dictate these folktales. A subtle strain of sexual politics also runs along with eco-feminist concerns through the poems of Mamang Dai like "Sorrow of Women" and "Voice of the Mountain". Poet and journalist from Nagaland Monalisha Changkija's poems are also replete with strong gender inversions, issues of power dynamics and a deep commitment to social cause. The 'intersectionality' of these women poets reflects the undertone of gender inequality in the Northeast as well as the heterogeneous sensibilities of an intrinsically polyglot culture (Ahmed 26).

A study on language, ecology and gender in North East India remains incomplete without its correlation to eco feminism. Ecofeminism centres upon the conception of nature as feminine, the domination of that feminine force by science and the way in which that contributes to the subjugation of women. Eco-feminists look at women's culture as more aligned to the natural world. Eco-feminists strive to dismantle the rigid patriarchal demarcations between body and intellect and civilization and nature from a theoretical perspective. And right from the outset, ecofeminism has been remarkably sensitive to links between local and global. Almost all women narratives from the Northeast have an invariable eco-feminist inclination in their literary and sociological expressions that reveal of a close tie with nature in their indomitable tryst against patriarchal forces. If poets like Nitoo observe and conserve through words and pictures, environmentalists execute it in action. In the field of environmental activism Green Oscar winner Purnima Devi Barman who worked for the conservation of the Hargila bird is a glaring example of eco-feminism from Assam. Even the tree man Jadav Payeng from is very much an eco-feminist in his role and principle. Another ecologist whom I read as an eco-feminist is Bano Haralu from Nagaland who is

known among the top environmentalists of India for leading a movement to protect the Amur Falcon from indiscriminate and large scale hunting in Nagaland. (Ahmed 30) It is because of her efforts that Nagaland has earned the title of being the 'Falcon Capital of the World'. She launched the 'Friends of the Amur Falcon' campaign as a way to provide conservation education to schools and local communities and earn their support in protecting the birds. Mubina Akhtar, an Assam based environmental journalist has documented extensively on pressing environmental concerns, especially rare birds in her regular "Green Reporting" columns in English and Assamese dailies (Ahmed 30).

Nitoo Das captures the essence of bird conservation through her exclusive photography on birds which serves as the raw base of her eco-feminist poetic concerns. Nitoo Das's evocative poetry with her two poem collections *Boki* and *Cyborg Proverbs* is resonant with an eco-feminist strain of woman-nature nexus. As for example in her poem "At Age Eleven" the poetic voice explores the puberty ritual of Assamese society which imitates having sex with a plantain tree. In her poem "Matshagandha" the sensuous smell of femininity is mythically expounded while in poems like "Jokhini" and "How to cut a Fish" the violent images of brutality on nature and womankind are closely paralleled. Nitoo Das's latest collection of poems *Crowbite* essentially captures the eeriness of one's unsettled feelings and inner consciousness at several stages of life in being and escaping from one's self surroundings and sexuality across the taverns of nature and habitats of ravens and crows finding a poetic way of drawing reason in creative madness. The eternal brood of an artist or more specifically a caricaturist parallel to that of a dense forest amidst wildness of birds and predators is brought alive in the title piece 'Crowbite' written in the mixed genre of a prose poem that touches upon a strand of magic realism as it informs the reader of the poetic persona Bhubai erstwhile known to the narrator's father and later Bhubai's metamorphosis into a crow, that led the poet to feel the urge to draw more crows after the unnatural death of the artist father, further enhanced with the sketches signalling a sign of macabre within the mundane, notwithstanding a Kafkaesque appeal for the reader .

. . . I saw the first changes in me and soon, Bhubai, the man turned into Bhubai the crow. I embraced the change with blue black wings. (*Crowbite* 22)

This statement shows the collapse of gender of the artist and human form in transformation into a crow for someone who is eluded by colour to embrace charcoal black imprints in art in all mediums. Similar collapse of human form into non-human is also seen in her poem "Cat's Daughters" which is a remaking of a famous Assamese folktale where a pregnant cat and her pregnant owner inter-change the nature of their offspring at delivery due to a cat's curse for denial of fish flesh for bones in "Mekurir Jiyekor Xadhu" from Lakshminath Bezbaruah's monumental collection *Burhi Aair Xadhu (Old Grandmother's Tales)*. Uttaran Dasgupta writes in a review in *The Wire*:

The narrative of this poem is located in the matrix of class and caste, but its genealogy can be traced to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In Book II of Ovid's poem, the Raven is transformed from white to black by Apollo's anger. A similar metamorphosis awaits Bhubai — a "lower caste" painter — who, like his father, has an itch to paint crows. (Dasgupta, 2021)

The North Eastern geographical terrain, the earthly charms of the myths and mysticisms from a traveller's eye are the core of the collection. Places like Shillong, Mawphlang, Sohra and Mawsmi Caves in Meghalaya and the Buddhist monasteries in

Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh are a special feature of this collection of poems that evokes the magical world of North East India in Das's resplendent imagery which moves inward to her mind's kaleidoscope. The repressed sexual angst of a nun in a Buddhist monastery is featured in the poem "Thukje Chueling Nunnery, Tawang" where she moans with a deep ascetic dilemma:

Every morning I fold deeper  
 Into my flesh, O Buddha  
 Every morning the stones walk  
 By fever, O Buddha  
 Every morning my hunger  
 Edges toward you, O Buddha (*Crowbite 50*)

It is interesting to note that both the title of the book and the poet's name are de-capitalized in the cover page, a trend not new to feminist poetry. This collection is an illuminating maze of memories brilliantly crafted with the poets' words and resonating sketches that takes the reader through the printed imprints of the paths of a world she calls "home." The issue of migration of Bangladeshi immigrants through porous borders around Assam and Meghalaya and other states is brought to the reader's mind in her poem "Bangladesh from a distance", where she apolitically wonders with de-familiarized surmise:

The yellow-grey haze  
 Over the never-ending fields  
 Looked like  
 The yellow-grey haze  
 of a different country. (*Crowbite 39*)

The poem "Gardening" is resonant with a pastoral note with its explicit eco-feminist undertone of juxtaposing fertility and death.

I am this biodegradable thing testing  
 The earth and time, spreading rhizome like  
 Beneath her skin. (*Crowbite 32*)

Again in the poem Mawphlang she calls the forest "an old woman opening her mouth" (11) where nature and a woman become one and the same in their secret grievances entailing domination. In the poem "On Shyness of Birds" a winged creature unexpectedly appears and disappears like a fleeting thought or a distant music of nature that remains unverified like the several untold tales of life on earth for its vulnerable beings, be it a bird or a tormented woman.

In that shiver of leaves, a certain caution lives. It is a thought  
 as precise as suspicion. Then, inside the gaps  
 linking rain and dawn, falls  
 the sure gasp of song. (*Crowbite 12*)

This sensitive representation of woman as nature in her poems makes Nitoo Das essentially a cultural eco-feminist celebrating the multi-ethnic locale of North East through poetry against oppressive mechanisms of race, class and gender operating at the tripartite layers of the individual psyche, interpersonal interactions and subtle and subversive social references.

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**“The Inept Archaeologist of Memories”:** Reading Memory and Return in Siddhartha Deb’s *The Point of Return*

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*Abstract*

*Siddhartha Deb’s novel The Point of Return (2002) is a story of double displacement, the first from the ancestral homeland in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in the aftermath of the partition of India in 1947 and the second from the adopted homeland of Shillong because of ethnic tensions. My study of this novel would look at how the idea of “return” to one’s roots plays out in the life of the protagonist, a third generation immigrant belonging to the Bengali Hindu community in India. We see the protagonist/ narrator’s insistent scrutiny of his memory - he calls himself “the inept archaeologist of memories”- memories of the place he calls his “hometown,” and the return to it to examine whether there is a possibility of recovering positive memories of it only to discover that “the present had no patience with my (his) spectral, half-fashioned memories”. The notion of meta-memory is manifested in the way the author constantly ponders on the dynamics of memory - the narrator remarks how he would not have invested in the memory of his father’s status of a “refugee” if he himself had not experienced the fear and trauma of being branded an “outsider.” My essay would seek to analyse the notions of migration, belonging, home and contested geographies from the perspective of memory studies.*

*Keywords: Memory, migration, meta-memory, ethnic tensions, refugee*

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**Introduction**

Siddhartha Deb’s novel *The Point of Return* (2002) narrates the travails of a family of the Bengali Hindu community that migrated from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) to the northeastern region of India during the partition of India in 1947. This work shows how the status of “refugee” clings on to the father and the son, the narrator of the novel. Shillong was the capital of undivided Assam and many members of the Bengali Hindu community tried to settle in it, though anti-foreigner movements that rocked the region in the late 70s and 80s after it became a part of a newly created state called Meghalaya, denied them their desired space of “home”. The family, therefore, resettles in the Bengali-dominated Cachar district of Assam. The novel shows how the partition migrants are not seamlessly incorporated in the new nation-state, rather they become implicated in the emerging ethnic dynamics, which is a legacy of colonial and continuing post-colonial policies. Amit Rahul Baishya points out how “the transition from a “Hindu” to an “Indian” identity in the eastern borderland region often came into conflict with local rivalries and issues that fractured the assumed seamlessness of the movement in to the “national order of things” ” (241). As the

novel's narrator, Babu says, "new battle lines were being drawn and fresh groups of people were being defined as outsiders, borders bristling with barbed-wire teeth" (296).

*The Point of Return*, a semi-autobiographical work, explores the emotions of nostalgia, the trauma of uprooting, and the continuing struggle to belong. The protagonist and narrator, Babu is a third generation immigrant and the novel is a dramatisation of his return to Shillong, the place where he was born and brought up, the place which he considers "home". I analyse this "return" in the many aspects it occurs – through the act of writing, the act of physically travelling to his place of birth and the act of recalling. This leads me to the questions that I seek to address in this essay - does this engagement with the past involve repair and recuperation; how is it related to the understanding of and finding bonds with one's kin; and how does it ultimately become a story of larger national, postcolonial histories and identities? The novel has many layers of displacement which make it a complex interplay of political forces – communal politics initially drive the members of the Hindu community away from the newly formed Muslim- dominated nation, then ethnic strife in their adopted land further uproot them exposing the difficulty of any easy assimilation, and then the bureaucratic and political corruption and nepotism which makes it even more difficult for such a community to finally belong and settle.

The novel is divided into four sections titled "Arrival," "Departure," "Terminal" and "Travelogue," thus giving the impression of a journey. This journey is both the father's and his (the son and narrator) own. This literal and metaphorical journey originates in a sense of emptiness, loss, anger and a final desire to return, retrieve, reconcile and possibly find a means of succour for future existence. Marianne Hirsch and Nancy K. Miller in their book *Rites of Return: Diaspora Poetics and the Politics of Memory* (2011) show how a legacy of violence has engendered "a set of rites – both individual and collective – that have taken many forms: the reconstruction of past histories, the retrieval of lost communities, the activation of historic sites, and a quest for origins" (xi). James Clifford added the homonym "routes" to "roots" and he thinks of diaspora as "positive transnationalism" capable of "interrupting identity based conflicts" (qtd in Hirsh and Miller 3) while Adrienne Rich in *Blood, Bread and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979-1985* (1986) writes that instead of obsessing over origins, one must recognize "the simultaneous oppressions" (123). Hirsh and Miller point out that "the very definition of diaspora depends on attachments to home and, typically, on the fantasy of return" (3) and their book, while focusing on the differential diasporic experiences of women, claim to make "space for the persistent power of nostalgia, and the magnetism of the idea of belonging, even while casting a critical eye on the obsession with roots" (5). Deb's novel, too, even while being preoccupied with the idea of return, problematises the notions of identity, location and originary homelands.

### **Writing the Past, the Elusive Search for Home, and the Transpersonal**

The first act of return is writing the past, in this case, the narrator's own personal past. The intention is to know and understand his father and how the fact of migration affected his life, relationships and career. In the absence of narratives, stories and personal diaries, the son has to examine the various actions, words and silences of his father to derive meaning and to draw connections. The narrator repeatedly wishes to comprehend what his father's original home, East Pakistan meant to him only to be confronted with silence.



Writing not only enables him to examine the omissions, the ellipses, the gestures that can provide a clue to his father's specific bonds with the natal home but to examine his own ties with his home and more importantly, writing facilitates the dialogue between his own past and his father's past with their similar trajectories of forced displacement.

Babu's childhood memories are littered with his father Dr Dam's efforts to build a house of his own and he notes what a herculean task it proved to be. The fate that was reserved for him was constant movement from one place to another in the name of security. Dr Dam studied in Bengal Veterinary College in Beliaghata, Calcutta and started his career as a junior doctor with the Assam Veterinary Department. After the partition of India in 1947, he and his family, comprising his parents, three brothers, a widowed sister and her child migrated to Assam, settling in the Thikarbasti slums in Silchar, later buying a piece of land in Silchar in the fifties. In the sixties, he bought a plot in the suburbs of Guwahati, close to the Narangi oil refineries where he painstakingly built a one-room house. He was transferred to Shillong, the then capital of Assam in 1969 and worked in the new veterinary department that was formed when it became the capital of the hill state, Meghalaya in 1972. He did not buy land in Shillong like some of his fellow Bengali immigrants, expecting to return to his house in Narangi after retirement but which he tragically loses to the government surveyor's plans for the area. By then, it was too late to buy land or house in Shillong as new laws prohibited "outsiders" from acquiring land there. The narrator remarks how, unlike the other Bengali neighbours who had laid claim to the town "through the solid foundations of their houses, he had not shaken off the stigma of the refugee" (43). He builds a house later in Silchar where one of his brothers, Biren and his family stay; it "was a last-ditch attempt to find a resting place" so that "he could ultimately set forth on his final journey from the same emotional space at which he had arrived fifty-six years earlier, the space some of us call home" (43). His life and career involved frequent trips to and stay in remote hill areas while he was in undivided Assam, carrying new vaccines for the animal populations of different tribal groups, his meager belongings stacked in a metal trunk. When he served in Shillong, he had to move from one rented place to another when certain spaces became unsafe for migrants like him.

The narrator notes that Dr Dam's struggles with land, the difficulties, financial and otherwise associated with building a house occurred amidst sweeping changes in the northeastern region of India post partition. These changes would ultimately ensure that he remained a refugee for life. "Fresh cartographic boundaries" (39) drawn repeatedly to satisfy ethnic identities and assertions, the preoccupations with land and demographic changes resulted in a permanent "outsider" status for Dr Dam. Sanjib Baruah in the essay "Citizens and Denizens: Ethnicity, Homelands and the Crisis of Displacement in Northeast India" points out how the policy structures of the colonial and postcolonial regimes have "led to the normalization of the idea of exclusive homelands for ethnically defined groups" (47). Meghalaya was a part of Assam and the movement for a separate hill state began in 1960. It was in 1972 that Meghalaya was formed by carving out two districts from the state of Assam – the united Khasi Hills and Jaintia Hills and the Garo Hills. The 1970s saw the rise in ethnic tensions in Meghalaya culminating in the anti- *dkhar* (khasi word for people from the plains) riots in 1979. There is implicit criticism in the novel of the anti-immigrant wave and identity politics based on the notion that a particular piece of land belongs only to autochthonous populations.

Nel Vandekerckhove in the essay, "We are Sons of this Soil" (2009), writes how the sons-of-the-soil conflicts in northeastern India, are the result of too strongly territorialized ethnic identities and the regular but highly selective reaffirmation of such "natural" geographic-cultural links. Through a process of ambivalent identification, classification, and arbitrary ethnographic mapping, the colony and the post-colonial state have reshaped Northeast India's politics of belonging entirely under the autochthony banner (546). This novel highlights what Nel Vandekerckhove shows in his essay, "the potential dangers of overly territorialized identities, the ambiguity of certain politics of belonging, and the often discursive impact on society of the politics of belonging" (525).

Dr Dam's need for a house plays out against the larger political ideas of "sons of the soil", citizenship, how and where to draw the borders, and who holds the rights to resources in a particular piece of land. One can view this in the light of the idea of the "transpersonal". Nancy K. Miller's term "transpersonal" emphasizes the links that connect "the individual not only backward in time vertically through earlier generations but also in a horizontal, present tense of affinities. The transpersonal is a zone of relation that is social, affective, material, and inevitably public" (qtd in Hirsch and Miller 5).

The narrative in the first two sections of the novel spanning the time-frame 1979-88 dealing with Dr Dam's efforts to bring about improvements in the milk supply scheme of the town, his integrity and honesty and his ultimate failure is an attempt by Babu to place in perspective the injustice of the treatment meted out to people like them. The mnemonic narrative thus strengthens his understanding of his father as he now begins to see him in the light of the souring of the new-found freedom of the nation, the corruption, greed and self-interest of the power-hungry rulers and the birth of new conflicts and ethnic tensions. As Babu describes his father and one of his colleague's lives and career, "their precarious official positions and fragile endeavours, all of which could be blown to dust" by a "few telephone calls from ministerial chambers" (129). The personal history therefore, begins to become the history of the nation, intermingled with the memories of his father's failures and disappointments which may well be the fate of many such middle-class families. These histories may also serve as a counter-discourse to the official histories of the nation.

### **Memory, Identity and Place**

Several theorists have analysed the relationship of identity and memory with place. Kelly Baker in her essay, "Identity, Memory and Place" points out that notions of the self and belonging are shaped by place in both imaginative and material ways. She remarks, "places must be understood both as flexibly constructed by people through their own attachments and narrative productions of self, and as reflecting these multifarious identities back to its occupants" (26). This novel scrutinises the act of remembering of one's birthplace and concludes that there are no easy, logical connections and identity formations.

The narrator, while referring to his favourite image of his father, says he is not sure from where he derived that image. Perhaps it was a scene his father had described it to him; he says, "as I am unsure about everything I have written about him" (301). Thus, by the narrator's own admission, whatever personal details he has given of his father in his book may have been imagined by him. This then brings us to the question of the functioning of memory itself; the selective nature of memory, the reasons for selection and omission, and

what it tells us of the memoriser's identity, location and position. Coming back to the image of his father he loves most, it is "of a shy and earnest young man riding a bicycle along a jungle track" (302). And though he is scared of wild elephants, he rides on "to save the life of some beast because that is his duty in the service of the government of India. And as the forest swallows him up completely, he is happy, not because India or the government means anything to him. India is just a name, but this forest rising around him is a country without boundaries, whose borders cannot be mapped, where the most the cartographers can do is mark, in bold letters: HERE THERE BE ELEPHANTS" (302). We can easily see why this picture, real or imagined, is a favourite and resonates with him. The source of his and his family's suffering and the pain of exile is the arbitrary drawing of boundaries; and a utopian desire for the exile would be a land without borders.

Babu critiques the notion of a rigid identity and the preoccupation with origins when he looks askance at the town of Silchar where his family finally settled, "Silchar was a small Bengali island in the state of Assam, heavily settled by immigrants from the villages of East Bengal who had brought with them a sense of identity that allowed for neither growth nor change. They were defined not by what they were- that was uncertain- but by what they were not" (107). Thus, Babu's act of return and recall does not prevent him from problematising the fixation with identity and roots. This is borne out by critics like Clifford, Rich and Hirsch who would advocate a transcending of the obsession with roots. When he was trying to analyse the reason for his return, he mentions it was not in search of roots or origins. "If we were all to do so, we whose lives are flung around in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, if we were to let loose our songlines, our routes of memory, our pilgrimage paths, we would find them faltering against the documents and borders and guns" (248, 249). But he admits it were the days of fear, the label of "foreigner" that made him return to reclaim this "confluence of childhood hopes and a faith in the future" (249), and to recover the "voice of the boy who had left with dreams of night journeys, of another future where he would be free and successful and unafraid of his alienness" (255).

Further, he talks of the politics of exclusion and groupism that pervaded their personal lives, "the "we" became composed exclusively of nontribals, and the tribal friends who had been a part of my life since the age of six faded away, joining groups of their own" (236). He wanted to empathise with the indigenous people, understanding that they too have been wronged but he was denied the opportunity to do so. He speaks of the stone tablet of Rabindranath Tagore which remained neglected and felt there was a certain justice to their indifference as there was no reference in his literary works of the people who had always lived there.

### **Postmemory: Transmitting Fear**

Since the act of writing involves story-telling and stories are repositories of cultural memory, Babu tries to recall any story that his father may have told him when he was a child. Dr Dam's hesitation in telling the stories leads Babu to speculate that he may have been "overwhelmed by the memories, each bit that surfaced revealing only a small part of the whole, fragmentary and uncertain" (142). Babu attempts to imagine what his father must have gone through during the anti- *dkhar* movement. Finally, he does tell Babu a story of the tiger which walked outside his bungalow when he was staying all alone in an isolated

place in Mizoram, then part of Assam. His son wonders if this story was really true and when Dr Dam utters the word "boots", the reader conjectures whether Dr Dam has transported the fear he felt when the sound of boots were heard outside his house during the anti-foreigner riots, to a fantasy story about tigers to be told to his child. The narrator relates the night of darkness during the riots to the one in 1971 (the year of the Bangladesh Liberation War), trying to reflect on what his father's memories may have been as the military aircraft moved towards East Pakistan. "Maybe he had become emotional at the thought of a war machine moving toward a land that for all the liberation to come would never again be home. Did he feel something, reading those place names that had been left behind the border of '47, or was that space with its tempestuous rivers and fishes and snakes, its groves overflowing with mangoes, guavas, and jackfruit, lost to his mind?" (150, 151). When Dr Dam hears the sound of boots on the gravel outside, he becomes paralysed with fear and thinks of the town, "maybe it will remain for him, if not in quite the same way" (152, 153). The fear he felt that day would be transported to his son, as he tells his son, "Boots, marching up and down, that night," (153). Babu notes that his father handed over "his memory of that fear and uncertainty" (153) to him. The son would carry that fear in places like Calcutta and Delhi where he has lived, indicating how a sense of belonging and attachment to any place eluded him.

Marianne Hirsch developed the concept of 'postmemory' which constitutes the practices that emerge from the intergenerational transmission of memory. She points out that there is often disowning of the legacy of difficult pasts. She writes, "Postmemory's connection to the past is thus not actually mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. To grow up with such overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one's birth or one's consciousness, is to risk having one's own stories and experiences displaced, even evacuated, by those of a previous generation" (107). In the case of Babu, there is absence of any narrative about the lost homeland, it is only at one point that Babu notes how "with retirement, the layers of life as a veterinary doctor, as an officer, had fallen away to reveal the peasant who had always lived beneath the suits and ties" (18). His grandfather, too, who suffered the loss of his ancestral farming land, left East Pakistan without a word or a glance back, lived first in the slums and then the house his son bought in Silchar without comment. His references to his lost home reflected an image of a permanent and unchanging landscape, "not something that was historical and therefore open to perpetual revision but a place beyond the vagaries of time" (35). It was through silence and by nursing the memory of an eternal unchanging space that Babu's grandfather dealt with the tragedy of partition.

Furthermore, Hirsch points out that "the legacies of the past, transmitted powerfully from parent to child within the family, are always inflected by broader public and generational stories, images, artifacts, and understandings that together shape identity and identification" (4). If Babu had not experienced the fear of the "outsider" and the murderous attacks on the non-indigenous communities, he would perhaps not have invested in the memory of his father's status of a refugee. He remarks, "No, I let go any idea of an ancestral homeland long ago and it would never have surfaced at all in my life had those days of fear not brought it up so sharply: "Go back, foreign dogs. Go back, Bangladeshis" (249). Calling himself the "teller of tales, the inept archaeologist of memories" (248), Babu says his obsession with the past is because he thinks there is no future or a present worth paying

attention to. The second part of the novel, which marks the physical return, where Babu returns to the place of his birth and growing up in order to reclaim a sense of home, plays out against the overwhelming fact of his father's migration. Thus, postmemory for Babu, is not about his stories being displaced but rather gaining in poignancy and meaning when seen in the light of his father's loss and inability to find a home.

### **Decoding the Return (physical and mental) and the Meaning of Memory**

The third section of the novel titled "Terminal" is where Babu describes his emotions and dreams on the home he has left behind. Babu remarks how his memories of the place come upon him at any time so much so that "I truly become the place. I am my own hometown" (208). However, the town refuses to accept him because his "forefathers came from elsewhere. From where? It cannot be found on the map of India, which, with its confident peaks and curves and wholeness, eliminates any speculation that in this representation of the subcontinent there are places that do not belong, people who do not belong" (210). The final section titled "Travelogue" where he returns to Shillong to try to find the remnants of the home of his birth and upbringing but what actually comes back to him is the fear which his father had felt. He had thought he had moved away from fear but the abuse he heard from the minister "Dkhar! Foreigner" (225) brings back to his mind that originary moment of fear, "the first time I walked into enemy country" (225). He recalls the incident when he, not more than ten years old, and his father were assaulted on the streets as they had supposedly violated a curfew that was announced in protest against foreigners. After this incident, he says he started running everyday which was symbolic of his fear. At the same time, Babu also realises that though he has deciphered that day of the assault as the beginning of fear, it was not so at that time, it was only "the return journey that has done this: space bends, time folds, and the past I attempt to talk about is impregnated by what comes after, laden heavy with all the failures that were not apparent then" (231).

He, therefore, analyses his return to his homeland as, "Past and present brought face to face at last, strung out on two ends of the long run; father and son, characters and narrator, the town and the self, all come together- here, now, at this whirling, dizzy point of vertigo that is the return" (230). He realises ultimately that his memory of his hometown will not remain positive. "Lies, half-truths conjured by the mind, irrelevant details- is that not what memory amounts to?" (230). The seminal thinker on the area of memory studies, the French philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs who wrote several works on "collective memory" from 1925 to the early 1940s, developed the idea that memory is not an individual phenomenon but a process which takes place within the family and the society. The memory of the group also realises itself in the individual memory. Halbwachs in *On Collective Memory* suggests that memories are created in the present in response to society which "from time to time obligates people not just to reproduce in thought previous events of their lives, but also to touch them up, to shorten them, or to complete them so that, however convinced we are that our memories are exact, we give them a prestige that reality did not possess" (51). Babu concludes that the anti-foreigner riots, the immense hostility against his community that came later ultimately stains his entire past though at that moment, he had thought that his world was very different from the adult world of animosity and divisiveness.

Commenting on the meaning that memory invests in the past through events in the present, he says, "What meaning my memory gives to it comes from my perception of events that came later, through the growing knowledge of those names Moni introduced me to that day, of the agenda and vision of the world that naming had sought to capture" (233). In the face of abuse like "Go back, foreign dogs. Go back, Bangladeshis" (238), the narrator wonders where one could go back as even the name of place changed; while his grandparents spoke of East Pakistan, his parents referred to Bangladesh. The place he called home evoked oscillating emotions of desire and virulent hatred. The way spaces transform is reflected in Babu's words, "The trees were no longer pines or firs or weeping willows. They had been assembled into a landscape of words, foreign words whispering "*Dkhar, Dkhar*," German names marching like storm troopers toward us, the nonpeople, the outsiders" (239). Babu's return reinforces what Hirsch and Miller note, "Returnees must come to terms with not just the possibility but often the inevitability of the failure to coincide with the lost object of the quest" (16).

Babu wanted to return to reclaim a notion of home to which he would feel a sense of belonging, only to find that "the present had no patience with my spectral, half-fashioned memories. The town that I had invented and refashioned in words and images was caving in under the weight of this, the real, the present, the now" (254). The fact that the present influences memory and the intricate relationship of memory, migration and the home from where one is exiled is indicated in these lines, "Each churning in the storehouse of memory that is me displaces something, changing the contours of my hometown, merging that place with people and incidents that came much, much later" (216). This reinforces Baker's idea that places are constructed by people through their attachments and productions of the self; though Babu wanted to fix the image of his home in the light of the happy childhood experiences, he failed to do so. Nicola King in the introduction to her book, *Memory, Narrative, Identity: Remembering the Self* (2000) which has been titled, "But we didn't know that then", talks of the "paradoxical 'knowing' and 'not knowing' that is the position of the autobiographical narrator, who "in the present moment of the narration, possesses the knowledge that she did not have 'then', in the moment of the experience" (2). King says that there is longing for a "time when we didn't know what was going to happen next – or, conversely, to relive the past with the foreknowledge we then lacked" (2) but memory can only be constructed in time. It is the longing to recover this former sense of time, and the "not knowing self" that one sees in Babu.

The novel can be called a fiction of "meta-memory" which in Neumann's words, "combine personally engaged memories with critically reflective perspectives on the functioning of memory, thus rendering the question of how we remember the central content of remembering" (337). The work's self awareness of memory is seen in this last section when the narrator tries to examine his memory – memory practices and different memories contesting with each other, "How did I achieve this unlikely feat of forgetting in the very act of remembrance, if the fear had been as overwhelming as I say it was?...Memory is also about what you decide to remember, so that you can make sense of what has been irrevocably lost" (254, 255). Babu wonders about who had the "disease" of nostalgia, his father who did not acknowledge the loss of his place verbally or in his diaries, or he himself who was constantly rewriting the landscape of his childhood hometown.

How then does one interpret the last words in the novel, "I look at my birthplace, knowing I will never see it again. I want it to be home for everyone who lives there, for everyone to have a place in it that cannot be lost or stolen. But how you achieve that future is no longer my concern, I tell my hometown. I have truly let go" (304). One cannot call it a redeeming of the ties with his homeland but one can decode it as a sort of recuperation. The return has freed him from any illusions that he harboured about the place he called home and can be a step forward towards the "positive transnationalism" of diaspora that James Clifford writes of. It enables him to see his story and his father's life in the context of the broader changes in the nation, the several oppressions and injustices, and makes him plead for a more inclusive and plural space.

Elazar Barkan in his essay, "The Politics of Return: When Rights become Rites" talks of how international policies always insist on the right to return, but in reality these rights are never implemented, they become merely "rites" – "useful as aspirations or speech acts, but actually harmful to refugees in that they impede other possible forms of political settlement" (qtd in Hirsch and Miller 18). Analysing the different meanings of "return", Hirsch and Miller remark that return attempts to exercise a "right to acknowledgement", "a counterfactual effort to imagine a world before disaster and displacement" which can become "an act of repair", "a claim to justice" and a "form of memory tourism" (18). *The Point of Return* can be read as beginning with a desire to retrieve one's roots and ending with a freedom from the paralysis of longing, and an appeal for harmony and tolerance.

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## Holocaust Consciousness in V.S. Naipaul's *In a Free State* - A Different Perspective

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### *Abstract*

*The paper attempts to show why in the postcolonial world the term 'Holocaust' can never be considered as a specific historical phenomenon; rather it must be used in its wider implication as the world we inhabit is full of human suffering in view of the painful plights of displaced communities worldwide. Besides bringing out V.S.Naipaul's Holocaust consciousness manifested in his portrayal of unhappy lives of displaced people, lives pathetically 'free' from any sense of belongingness, their challenges and predicaments in the context of In a Free State, the author tries to justify the use of 'comic' in Holocaust comedies keeping in view Naipaul's unique use of 'comic.'. Moreover by finding parallelisms from Holocaust film comedies Naipaul's use of 'comic' is considered. The paper tries to theorize the need of taking resort to 'comedy' in order to survive in a world full of threats and challenges.*

*Keywords: Displacement, Holocaust, comic, Parallelisms*

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"It's amazing. The race that has suffered the most is obviously the Jews in the Holocaust, and the Jewish humour is very much a part of suffering."

Walcott and Baer 1996, 171

"I took refuge in humour – comedy, funniness, the satirical reflex, in writing as in life, so often a covering up for confusion".

*The Enigma of Arrival* 1987, 167

## **Introduction**

Comedy for ages has remained a matter of controversy in literature. The arguments traditionally placed against comedy are: "Addressing motifs of ridicule, comedy is itself ridiculous and can, thus not be taken seriously. It cannot prove a source of insight as tragedy can" (Dadlez and Luthi 2018:81). Tragedy is viewed as the highest kind of literary form whilst comedy is held inferior to it. As says Stolnitz, comedy is "lower than tragedy not only because of the lesser intensity, complexity and subtlety of our response...but also because it lacks the compactness and vividness of structure which, as tragedy unfolds in time, creates a tightly-knit, climactic and integrated experience in the spectator" (Stolintz 1955:60). However, the similarities between tragedy and comedy have been underlined by a number of

critics. Jerome Stolintz admits: “Although comedy and tragedy are frequently considered antithetical in substance and treatment, one can hardly reflect for very long about these forms without being brought to an awareness of the bewildering similarities between them” (Stolintz 1955: 45). The apparent similarity between these two forms, is both the comic and the tragic protagonists “suffer a defeat or loss of values in the course of action” (Stolintz 1955: 47). Both of them learn though in different ways. Moreover, as thinks Dadlez and Luthi “Comedy, when successful, elicits amusement. Tragedy aspires to arouse pity and fear....The two fulfill these distinct functions in surprisingly similar ways....One of the decisive links between tragedy and comedy is their reliance on incongruity\_ that is, on phenomena and scenarios that violate established patterns or expectations” (Dadlez and Luthi 2018:82). Similarities are even found in investigation of tragic and comic catharsis. Kieran observes, to those who view comedy as a less serious work of art in comparison to tragedy, there have always remained three specific judgemental errors in relation to comedy. They are, as thinks Kieran, supposed “superiority of Structure”, “Superiority of Responses” and “Superior Significance” of tragedy over comedy (Kieran 2013: 4-6). In his argument to champion the cause of comedy, Kieran shows how in highest forms of comedies we are to get complex dramatic structure as well as “audience apprehension and responses” and establishing the “value and significance” of comic mode, Kieran concludes thus:“ Hopeful Comedy is the equal of despairing tragedy”(Kieran 2013:25). Dadlez and Luthi are also of the same view that the two forms equal each other. While advocating the cause of comedy they say: “ ...philosophical and other investigations have challenged this reduction, underlining not simply the enjoyment afforded by comedy but further emphasizing its role as an authentic counterpart of tragedy, capable of generating equally important insights and capable of canvassing equally significant issues” (Dadlez and Luthi 2018:81). Yet comedy is often thought to be lighthearted amusement or entertainment aiming to give an escape from reality. Is comedy actually a kind of ‘time out’ from the real world? To the propagators of modern comic theory, it rather provides another perspective – no less valuable than the tragic one, of that world. By showing the association of comedy with the potentially anarchic and subversive elements, these critics have extended our awareness to this extent that comedy is a serious pursuit and its function is not simply stirring laughter. Indeed, comedy expresses a “stubborn refusal to give tragedy . . . the final say” (Hynes 1969:232). Tragedy has a sense of finality in it while a comedy is actually about loss, followed by recovery. In a tragedy, towards the end there is only a hint to the reconstruction of damaged social structure which has led to the tragedy whereas in a comedy there is the celebration of the reconstruction. Thus comedy is less final but more complete. This is why Northrop Frye says: “Tragedy is really implicit or uncompleted comedy”(Palmer 1984:78-79). “...a humorous attitude is not the same as an attitude lacking in seriousness. It is, rather, an ability to see things within the context of multiple perspectives”, opines Marmysz (Marmysz 2003:162). A comedian is essentially as serious as a tragedian, the comic crux lying only in the way a comedian tries to cope with despair, anxiety and suffering which is different from that of a tragedian. According to Eric Bentley: “The comic poet does not speak his feelings directly but veils them, contradicts them with pranks or elegancies. It is not necessarily the feelings themselves that differ from those of tragedy; it can rather be the way they are veiled. Comedy is indirect, ironical. It says fun when it means misery. And when it lets the misery show, it is able to transcend it in joy” (Palmer 1984:140-141). Therefore, though comedy

may end with hope, assurance and note of optimism, that optimism can even be subversive. Northrop Frye has rightly observed: "Comedy contains a potential tragedy within itself"(Palmer1984:79). Comedy is not incompatible with seriousness, as comedy includes the possibilities of tragic within itself. This attitude to the 'comic' is central to the theoretical premise of this paper.

The element of subversion in comic humour is the concern of the author here. The subversive humour is the expression of one's dissatisfaction with the world as it is, his or her inability to accept everything in its present status. Kramer says: "This sort of humor has as one of its goals the subversion of an unjust status quo...The subversive humorist is not laughing stoically against an unjust reality that is inexorable no matter what one does \_ this is the spirit of seriousness. Rather she is laughing at incongruities between reality and the way she thinks it should(and could) be"(Kramer 2015:4-10).. When there remains no possibility of protest in any form against the existing system/social structure/injustices, there remains for the victims only one available way to rescue themselves from despair and to the author it is this subversive humour. The purpose of the author here is to find the link between comic mode and probably the gravest among all human experiences, Holocaust and thereafter extending it to examine how in Naipaul's novella, *In a Free State* the Holocaust consciousness is expressed comically and the investigation is made through finding parallelisms with Holocaust comedies. Specifically the objective of the paper is three-fold. First, as the title proclaims, the author will try to trace as to what extent Naipaul writes from a Holocaust consciousness. Secondly, in brief, to attempt to theoretically justify the presence of 'comic' in Holocaust comedies, and finally the author aims to bring out the parallelisms – thematic as well as in the usage of 'comic'– that lie between Holocaust comedies and Naipaul's *In a Free State*, so that in a world full of unhappiness and misery, the need of taking refuge in the 'comic' can be unerringly established.

### **Broad Perspective of 'Holocaust'**

For hundreds of years the word 'Holocaust' has been used in English to signify massive slaughters or massacres. Since 1960s the term has been exclusively used by writers and scholars to speak about the methodically organized mass murder of Jews during World War II. Jewish Holocaust is a crime on such a scale that there is a controversy whether the term can be appropriately referred to other genocides of other regimes or not. However, at times the term is used in its wider implications. In this sense any event that causes human misery on a colossal scale can be termed as 'Holocaust.' There is, for instance, nuclear Holocaust; American Holocaust that refers to the killing of 50-100 million aboriginal people and African Holocaust that refers to the slave trade and colonization of Africa. Even Partition of India in 1947 - the most painful experience of displacement, division of lands, hearts and communities, is described by Indian as well as British writers as the cause for brutal Holocaust in the history of mankind. Probably history does not permit us to use the term 'Holocaust' in the restricted sense. In Holocaust literature, however, there are tendencies of both the kinds – to address the Holocaust directly as well as to present the Holocaust in its universal connotation. For instance, in the writings of Cynthia Ozick, Holocaust is directly addressed. Post-Holocaust Jewish diaspora is the subject of A

*Mercenary* (1987) and *Bloodshed* (1995) whereas Amos Oz has tried to view Holocaust in global perspective. In the novella *The Hill of Evil Counsel* (1991), Oz does not mention the Holocaust but human suffering is his theme. His engagement with the Holocaust here seems to be oblique. For him holocaust exists in the social and cultural reminders around him. In this sense holocaust is as present as ever. Ben-Ghiat holds that even in Benigni's film *Holocaust* is not treated as specifically Jewish tragedy through "the inclusion of a self-sacrificing Christian wife [who] affirms that Jews have no monopoly in Italy on the state of victimhood . . ." (Ben-Ghiat 2001:263). Caryl Philips in *Higher Ground: A Novel in Three Parts* (2006) incorporates Holocaust into his fictive explorations of exile and memory. Similarly, in *In a Free State*, Naipaul addresses Holocaust indirectly. He focuses on the global perspective of Holocaust while depicting the lives of exiles in a foreign land. His point being helplessness, suffering and victimization of man persist to be everywhere whether he is in America, in London or in Africa.

### **Holocaust Themes and Comedy**

Now it is very interesting to have a look at Holocaust film comedies which are mainly about the persecution of the Jews, Israelis and other ethnic groups victimized by Nazis. "Most of these films use their sparse humour to prevent the overwhelming sadness from consuming the audience: the comic relief is a coping mechanism." (Geldzaher 2012). Such humour, is termed as 'gallows humour' or 'holocaust humour.' Holocaust comedies are disturbing because of the inappropriate closeness of the words 'comedy' and 'Holocaust' as apparently comedy seems to have no place in such appalling events. Is the use of 'comic' really inappropriate to portray the grave aspects of life or is it used as a weapon to combat the brutal realities of life? Lentin observes that 'comic' is used to portray such themes because, "comedy...can sometimes tell the truth that tragedy and melodrama...very often avoid and evade (Lentin 2004:132). Mel Brooks says: "Tragedy is when I cut my finger. Comedy is when you fall down on an open sewer and die" (Stott 2005:1). The point to be noted is that the right kind of comedy (where through the façade of comedy the central tragedy is seen) is at times more appropriate than the tragic to present the sad aspects of life. Another reason of why 'comic' is used in Holocaust comedies is, the comic represents that human spirit which cannot be diminished by fascism. Carpenter says: "I believe laughter provides relief from tragedy while still maintaining the intensity of the situation. Laughter does not change the situation but it changes the way the victim internalizes the situation....Laughter did not allow the prisoner an easy escape. However, it provided an other perspective on their world....Each day that they woke up, they had to make the decision to laugh at their imprisonment, or become consumed by it." The kind of attitude was "restorative", she concludes, for the prisoners (Carpenter 2010:3-7). 'Comic' is used in Holocaust comedies, to express faith in the ability of humanity to conquer evil and if not so then at least to bear it with dignity. According to Meirich, humor performs two main functions in holocaust film and literature. "First it restores a potential loss of dignity and helps the victims endure the incomprehensible. Second it challenges the prevailing truth and the established order" (Meirich 2013: i). The same is emphasized in the observation of Carpenter: "Finding humour in the oppression is the most important step to overcoming the

fear of the oppressor. If one can laugh at the tragedy that consumes so many, he can begin to undertake other forms of resistance” (Carpenter 2010: 9). Furthermore, normally comedies end with a standardized happy ending, “a conscious superimposition of a formal pattern on material that may until the very last moment whirl with turbulence” (Jagendorf 1984:43). For instance, we may refer to Ben Jonson’s *Volpone* (2014). But in a Holocaust comedy instead, as Lentin notices, “The narrative strategy is perhaps designed “to shield the spectator from the real horrors” or just as a “self-defense strategy, aimed to shield the creator of the comedy from charges of historical authority” (Lentin 2004:131). Thus, though Holocaust comedies are not comedies in the traditional sense, here a kind of narrative strategy is devised so that spectators are provided with a kind of relief. Additionally what must be noted is the fact that the Holocaust comedy is not completely devoid of hope and optimism about future happiness. To address the Holocaust, either directly or indirectly, ‘comic’ is used because laughter is associated with ridicule and is as Gilman observes, “a means of presenting the unrepresentable, not only in the Shoah but the randomness of life” (Gilman 2000:304). The humour that marks Holocaust comedies should be taken seriously as the comic perspective is of the same human condition as that of the tragic perspective. In all Holocaust comedies at a certain point the comedy is sullied and we are given a serious, a pathetic message. Zizek argues that in such comedies there is “a Zero point at which the apposition between tragedy and comedy, between the sublime and the ridiculous, between dignity and derision is suspended, the point at which one directly passes into opposite...” (Zizek 2000:26-29). Therefore, the application of humour to the Holocaust should not look offensive as it serves three main functions. First, humour focuses attention on what is wrong. Secondly, it creates solidarity in those laughing together at the oppressor. And finally it helps the oppressed to survive, to get through their suffering, the trauma, without going insane. However, significantly, when Naipaul’s use of ‘comic’ in *In a Free State* is compared to the use of it in a Holocaust comedy, our attention is drawn to a number of parallelisms.

### **Parallelisms between Holocaust Film Comedies and *In a Free State***

*In a Free State* is largely about journeys, loss and drifting, “the movement from one place to another and of what is involved in that, the victimization, being alien and lost...” (Walsh 1970:10). The novella quite aptly begins with a journey, an account of a two-day crossing from Piraeus to Alexandria. In the “Prologue” the tramp is victimized and tormented by some of the co-passengers of the ship. In “One Out of Many” Naipaul brings out the pain and hazards in the life of a migrant. Santosh, in the land of his self-chosen migration, suffers immeasurably so that towards the end of the story he is aware of no other demands, no other feelings and instincts of his own apart from the mere “presence” of his body. In relation to his ultimate realization in life the narrator says: “All that my freedom has brought me is the knowledge that I have a face and have a body, that I must feed this body and clothe this body for a certain number of years. Then it will be over” (Naipaul, 53). Janos Pilinszky offers us in his poetry a vision of humanity “stripped of everything but the biological persistence of cells” (Hughes1989:9). In “Tell Me Who to Kill” the narrator, the West-Indian brother has to bear so much torment in an alien surrounding that he goes insane. In the final story apart from hopelessness and frustration, there is almost nothing for Bobby

and Linda to get from their lives in the land of their self-chosen exile. Bobby is tortured at the barrack room by the army and it sends an echo back to the persecution of man in the regime of Nazi Germany. In the "Epilogue" we are once more disturbed when Naipaul shows how the whipping of the Egyptian beggar boys can be entertaining to the travelers and the book ends with reference to the "ragged waiters" (Naipaul, 246), "agitated peasant crowds" and "defeated soldiers" who are to know total defeat in the desert" (Naipaul, 247). Thus, throughout the book Naipaul's focus is on helplessness, suffering and victimization of poor mankind. Holocaust never needs to be mentioned. But its absence never lets one forget the "presence" of it as the torture and persecution of mankind and the resultant pain and suffering of poor human folk is as present as ever. Only the machinery of torture gets changed in ages. However, not only thematically but also in his use of 'comic' Naipaul's novella has resemblances with that of a Holocaust film comedy.

A Holocaust comedy does not end happily. Similarly, here neither of the stories has happy ending. The marriages that take place in the first two stories are not indicative of better future. Naipaul uses humour mostly to show the wrongness of the situations. For instance, sometimes we are tempted to view Santosh as a comic character. At times his situations appear to us funny. But beneath that what is apparently amusing, there lies the central sadness of his position. The very first day Santosh comes to Washington, he starts feeling completely "enclosed" Santosh's discomfort at the sound of air-conditioner or the sense of enclosure of a man who has never been in an aeroplane before or has never used an elevator is comic. But the suggestions of an incremental enclosure serve to underline the systematic reduction of freedom attending the life of a migrant. It seems that in Holocaust comedy when no more laughter is possible, the hero tends to achieve a tragic dignity; he becomes almost a heroic figure. It applies to Naipaul's second story which is almost devoid of the comic touches. One major function of humour is that it helps one to go through the trauma of living. But in this story the narrator is to suffer so terribly, that he fails to retain his sense of humour. It further causes a severe nervous breakdown and though he recovers from it, he ultimately becomes a pathetic figure. But he is still heroic in the sense that he is not a completely defeated character. He thinks of sending a message of death to his home but he does not commit suicide even in the face of utter hopelessness. In the final story Linda is allowed to employ her sense of humour to go through her sense of trauma. But finally it is the horrible situation all around her that makes her sense of humour stop working. In the final story once again there are some sources that give rise to comic pleasure as the characters here attempt to have comic escape. It is true that the situation is so horrible that they are not allowed such escapes but their attempts to take resort to humour to go through the trauma of living almost symbolizes Naipaul's attempt to represent the horror of living comically. However, it is to be noted that the principal feature of a Holocaust film comedy is to present horror comically. The task is a difficult one as at the same time it should not appear as a comic entertainment. Though Naipaul uses 'comic', the novella cannot be called a comedy. The book is even not a tragedy as no great tragedy befalls any of these characters. Zizek (Zizek 2000:26-29) discusses the failure of tragedy and comedy genres to represent the Holocaust. Naipaul writes here from the deepest ironic vision, in the words of Friedlander the "tragic-ironic" vision (Friedlander 1988:289), the same that permeates a Holocaust comedy.

Next, like Holocaust comedies, survival is the goal of Naipaul's characters, despite the fact that their lives gradually tend to become meaningless. The tramp has been travelling for the past thirty-eight years but ironically he receives almost nothing from life; his life is reduced to names and numbers (Naipaul, 4). Ultimately Santosh discovers that life has nothing good in store for him; life for him comes to mean only feeding and clothing his body for a certain number of years. In the second story the narrator's life becomes completely meaningless when his younger brother evades all of his plans of being provided with education and the life of a gentleman and starts despising him. Bobby and Linda are completely disillusioned. They think of leaving the country as they no longer hope anything good to come to them there. The characters are dejected, completely frustrated. Yet they desperately want to survive. The tramp takes shelter inside a locked cabin to save himself from the motiveless cruelty of his co-passengers. Santosh marries the 'hubshi' woman as he thinks it will facilitate his living and survival. Dayo, the younger West-Indian brother prefers assimilation with the foreigners which he thinks will help his attempt to survive. Bobby and Linda plan to leave their hostile surrounding in search of a better life though survival is difficult and challenging. Naipaul here also depicts the horrible plight of the post-colonial nation-state. The empty dead, burnt-out villages (Naipaul, 263), the empty roads (Naipaul, 212), the desolation of the derelict resort all these speak of the bloody power struggle and racial conflicts that are going on in the country. The horrible and desolate description of the town, Bobby and Linda come to pass in their way to the 'collectorate' reminds one of war-time Europe. There are pictures of human suffering all around – the colonel lives in fear of death; Bobby's nightmare of "Exploding head" brings to him foreboding of danger (Naipaul, 222); girls are tortured at the barracks (Naipaul, 218) even when it is still afternoon; Bobby is badly beaten up by the soldiers and the king is brutally murdered. Naipaul's Holocaust consciousness is revealed in his depiction of human suffering and horror in a post-colonial state. Thus, for Naipaul, holocaust is no specific Jewish tragedy; it is a universal phenomenon with which his characters are trying to cope with, through occasional recourse to humour whereby, in the words of Liat Steir Livny, is reflected "humour's important role as a defense mechanism against the acting out of the trauma, a tool to vent frustration and fight various aspects of Holocaust commemoration, and an attempt to tone down the constant anxiety that the canonical memory agents create by deconstructing the fear factor" ("Author's Interview," *The Times of Israel*, [www.timesofisrael.com](http://www.timesofisrael.com) 7<sup>th</sup> July, 2020).

## Conclusion

Thus, in the paper the use of 'comic' in Holocaust comedies is attempted to be theoretically justified. It alongside brings out Naipaul's Holocaust consciousness, tries to examine how Naipaul uses 'comic' in a way that befits holocaust film comedies so that when their situations appear to us comic, we are simultaneously aware of the underlying tragedy as Zizek most significantly observes in a Holocaust comedy, "If we present their predicament as tragic the result is comic, if we treat them as comic tragedy emerges . . ." (Zizek 2000:26-29). However, the parallelisms found here between Naipaul's text and Holocaust film comedies, undoubtedly strengthens the claim that because of its restorative function, its capacity to successfully resist the fear of the oppressor and its power to

challenge the existing world order, the occasional recourse to the 'comic' is the only tool left for humanity to combat the horror that permeates its worldly existence.

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## Skirting Boundaries of Folk and Popular: Role of Intermediality in Shaping Mirabai as a Folk Cultural Icon

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### *Abstract*

*This paper discusses how Mirabai, the 16<sup>th</sup> century saint hailing from Rajasthan transitions from a religious figure into a 'folk cultural icon' by acquiring complex over-layering of connotations over a period of time, using Intermediality as an approach. Additionally, the Bakhtinian theoretical framework of "chronotopes" relating to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships, artistically expressed in the mediums chosen for this study, situates the narratives within specific regional and cultural contexts. More specifically, this study illustrates how the popular appeal garnered by Mirabai also seeps into the socio-religious practices. Most renowned as Lord Krishna's ardent devotee, Mira was a bhakti poet whose poems reveal the intimate aspects of her life, struggles and victories. Her fearlessness and utter disregard for societal norms and conventions makes her relatable to people belonging to different groups. Several folktales and legends feature Mirabai's quest and adventures in attaining her divine lover, Lord Krishna. Therefore, in this paper intermediality is used as an approach to examine the ways in which the saint poet Mirabai is integrated in the cultural imagination as a 'folk cultural icon' in varied textual mediums more specifically in Kiran Nagarkar's historical fictional adaptation Cuckold, 1997 and the Comic Book series Mirabai by Amara Chitra Katha, 1972.*

*Keywords: Popular Culture, Folkloristics, Bhakti, Bakhtin, Intermediality, Religious saint, Mirabai.*

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### **Introduction**

Bhakti was an emotion driven movement that pervaded various parts of the Indian subcontinent and brought about a paradigmatic shift in the relationship between the human being and the divine. It originated in South India around the 7<sup>th</sup> century and then moved towards the north from the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The movement developed as a counterculture to institutionalized Hinduism; it popularized the notion of the personal god wherein the poet saints sang the praise of gods in the regional tongue. Thus, owing to this, a part of the said cult lent itself to the folk movement. An ardent practitioner of such a devotion is Mira (Meera/Mirabai), the 16<sup>th</sup> century poet princess of Rajasthan. Her legends and songs have lived for over decades through her poetic compositions performed equally by both folk and classical singers to this date.

Mirabai could be historically contextualized within the medieval or early modern North India poet/saint singers specifically within the *Saguna* (bhakti expressions featuring devotional appreciation of the tangible attributes of the Supreme Being) trajectory of Krishna

Bhakti tradition that flourished in northern India. The earliest account of Mirabai's story is the *Bhaktimal* in which Mira the Rajput princess echoes the love and devotion of the cow herding women or *gopis* who gave up their modesty and their wifely duties for Lord Krishna; Mira who took Lord Krishna to be her divine husband, considered her earthly marriage of secondary importance (Hawley 51-52). Subsequently Meera's story about her fierce spirit, her utter disregard for societal norms and the struggles of societal oppression has been represented through popular culture via entertainment mediums such as cinema and television and has also been adapted to literary or textual forms.

Although there has been extensive research in various aspects of Mirabai's life this paper undertakes a study of the adaptations from two textual mediums (*Cuckold* 1997; *Mirabai* by Amara Chitra Katha 1972). Specifically, it employs Intermediality as a theoretical approach to examine the ways in which the saint poet Mirabai traverses the limits of sainthood and is integrated in the cultural imagination as a 'folk cultural icon' in the chosen literary adaptations.

### **Representations and Re-imaginings: Intermediality and the Case of Mirabai**

The relationship between popular culture and folk culture has been deliberated upon by several scholars. Using Popular culture as a lens to examine religious phenomenon provides interesting insights into the role of religion in everyday life of people and the shifts in its perception over the changing times within the culture it exists ("Introduction" Forbes and Mahan 2). Discussing the relationship between religion and popular culture, Wade Clark Roof makes a very valid statement; he points out that with the changing times it is increasingly difficult to make a clear distinction between folk and popular culture. People living in contemporary western (and Indian) societies construct their lives from varied cultural resources and traditions. Owing to which a clear distinction between the folk and the popular may not be particularly meaningful in the contemporary scenario (Roof 109-122). In the Indian context, Popular culture in the forms of television, soap serials and so on have adapted the life stories of saints and godly figures. Mirabai is no exception to this; her life legends and compositions have been adapted to different mediums such as song and dance performances; weekly television series cast in the Doordarshan (1997); Gulzar's *Meera* starring yester year actress Hema Malini as well as the famous Ellis Dungan's 1945 film *Meera* in Tamil featuring the renown classical singer M. S. Subbalakshmi to name a few. Thus, the influence of popular cultural mediums has penetrated modalities of *bhakti* expression wherein film songs about Mirabai are also sung during *bhajans* and *satsangs*, this however is an entirely different topic for discussion.

Mira's story being that of challenging societal normal and going against the grain makes her relatable to people. Although historical evidences about her life have been minimal, Mira is a part of the collective memory of the people on account of her songs, legends and folktales. In this regard this study restricts its scope to the two aforementioned textual mediums; using intermediality as theoretical framework, it ambitions to analyse the transitioning of Mirabai and uncover the complexities to her personality accrued over time.

The term intermediality denotes the inter-connectedness between various mediums which includes communication through different discourses and "modalities of interaction" such as music, film and so on. The notion of intermediality is a successor to the Bakhtinian

origins of intertextuality, later expanded by Julia Kristeva. Kristeva proposes in her works that in addition to texts being understood in relation to other texts, she argues that “all signs are defined and understood in relation to the other signs (Jensen 1-2). According to Juha Herkin Intermediality can be defined as “an approach that examines the relationships between various media in a particular historical context” and it emphasizes on “the continuity of media forms” particularly “the articulation and re-articulation of the media through changing social and cultural contexts” (Herkins 7-8). The following definition is befitting to examine the depiction and representation of the saint poet Mirabai through the ‘created chronotopes’ in the two different textual mediums namely, the novel and the Comic Book wherein the primary plot line or *fabula* remains the same across mediums. However, the *suzhet* or the narrative construction varies with the changes in time and space variables or “chronotopes.”

Bakhtin develops the concept of chronotopes from Einstein’s Theory of Relativity relating to the inseparability of space and time both in science and literature (Bakhtin 84). Moreover “A literary work’s artistic unity in relationship to an actual reality is defined by its chronotope” (Bakhtin 243). There may exist different chronotopes within a text exhibiting different complex interactions among them. Additionally, chronotopes are “...mutually inclusive, they co-exist, they maybe interwoven with, replace or oppose one another” where they dialogue with different variables. Therefore, out of the actual chronotopes of our world (which serve as a source of representation) emerge the reflected and created chronotopes of the world represented in the work (in the literary texts) (253). Deriving from the above statement, the ‘actual chronotopes of the world’ corresponds to the influence of the real world’s time and space and the ‘created chronotopes’ would pertain to the re-imaginings and the innovations made within the said medium.

### **Narrating Mira in Textual Adaptations**

The literary adaptation Kiran Nagarkar’s *Cuckold* (1997) presents a counter hagiographical account of Mira. Nagarkar confesses in one of his interviews that he did not care much for Mirabai and that in his opinion “she was just a non-stop cluster of cliches in the public imagination” (Ghosh); Her husband on the other hand was completely erased from memory and therefore a point of interest for Nagarkar. Set against the landscape of Medieval Rajasthan and its courtly grandeur, the novel is an example of historical fiction which imaginatively reconstructs medieval Indian warfare and the political climate. The narrative features a gripping military account of history of Mewar from Maharaja Kumar’s perspective through whom it conducts a reconstruction of medieval Indian History (Deshpande 1824). Greeneyes or little saint based on Mira is only a secondary character. The novel is situated at a nexus between history and imagination in which the chronotopes created in the novel corresponds to a point of time in history which in addition to narrating the life events of Maharaj Kumar is also an emotive account of the history of Mewar from his perspective (ibid.).

The wife of the Maharaj Kumar is based on Mira often referred to as Greeneyes in this novel is an inconvenience; a distraction from his political goals, Mira is depicted as a flippant teenager who rejects her husband’s advances for intimacy. Thus, Meera’s character

is portrayed through a Royal insider's perspective belonging to a patriarchal household and therefore unsavoury:

'I came about the nautch girl in your harem. Are you man enough to keep her under control? Or do you want me to do it for you?'... Are you listening, you fool? I can see your eyes floating in sleep but there are matters here that need urgent attention. The nautch girl.'... 'She has cut off our noses. And our *izzat*. Our illustrious family name is mud. While Chittor burns, your nautch girl continues to dance.' (Nagarkar 9-10)

In the above excerpt it becomes evident that Mira is not eulogized but is rather humanized; She is depicted as a flippant teenager, a distraction to the Kings's political goals, constantly rejecting her husband's advances for intimacy. Although the Maharaj Kumar is an efficient statesman, his obsession to attain the love of his wife brings about his downfall; his inability to control his wife leads to his political decline and loss of respect. Mira however evolves from Greeneyes, a mere 'nautch girl' to a saint worshipped by people of Mewar. (Ahmed Farooque 176). The counter hagiographical gives protagonism to the lesser-known character of Maharaj Kumar, however it depicts Mira as a lovelorn woman who is vulnerable to mortal desires.

In a shocking contrast to the novel would be the popular Comic Book series by Anant Pai and team. Amar Chitra Katha's version is rather subdued as opposed to the fiercely rebellious person that Mira was as seen in other mediums discussed in this study. The Amar Chitra Katha was first introduced in 1967 as an attempt to introduce stories about India's great cultural heritage to the younger generation. The Comic Book series was specifically targeted to the children and hence had a prominent didactic undercurrent with Mirabai being the first in a sequence of saints brought out in the series. Mirabai's traditional role as a wife serves as a good example to project her religious righteousness as the epitome of feminine virtues for educating the younger generation of India. By doing so, the saints of India are brought together to serve the goal of Amara Chitra's Katha's ideals of 'National-integration' (Hawley 140). The Comic Book systematically domesticates Meera by aligning her *bhakti* to the ideal Hindu woman's *Dharma* (ibid. 142). During the course of the narrative, Mira is portrayed to be a "good Hindu wife" (Mirabai 36:4) who obeys her husband (Mirabai 36:11).

Furthermore, Mira endures and triumphs over all the attacks made on her life through deadly snakes and poisoning by the new Rana, her brother-in-law. Her struggle against the atrocities committed towards her and Mira's triumph over them is particularly curated through the chronotopes in the Comic Book narrative. She overcomes the tortures and emerges as an empowered enlightened figure of heightened spiritual consciousness, worthy of being integrated as a part of the Indian cultural heritage. Lastly, Meera's aging is differently handled in the Comic Book. In most familiar versions of her legends, she leaves her human body in the prime of her youth and becomes one with her divine lover in Dwaraka. However, in the Comic Book Meera goes on her pilgrimage to all the places dear to Lord Krishna as she grows old [ 36:29]. The aging of Meera justifies her leaving her husband and family and serves as a socially approved way of seeking the path of enlightenment as older women ascetics do in comparison to a young woman who would dare to leave her domestic duties as a good wife (Hawley 147). Meera finally becomes one with

her Lord through unwavering devotion and in an appropriate manner considering the sensual nature of her devotion slowly fades with age.

### **Beyond Sainthood: The Transitioning of Mirabai as a Folk Cultural Icon**

Mira a saint figure gradually skirts the limits of a purely religious affiliation and enters the popular imagination. The textual mediums provide different dimensions to her personality and complicate her character portrayal in the chosen mediums. Moreover, the framework of intermediality challenges the eventual homogenization of saint lives narratives and compositions. The created chronotopes in each of the medium's account for the cultural and contextual variations. Mira's story being that of challenging societal normal and going against the grain makes her relatable to people. Although historical evidences about her life have been minimal, Mira lives through her songs, legends and folktale and the lack of one hegemonic narrative offers scope for "people [to] identify with her character and plight in different ways and imagine her life differently" ("Mirabai Comes to America" Martin 13-14). Thus, we may concur that the continuities and the digressions seen in various mediums collectively contribute to shaping the 16<sup>th</sup> century saint poet into a culturally recognizable entity rather than merely a saint from the *bhakti* tradition.

The term cultural icon according to a draft version of Oxford English Dictionary is defined as "A person or thing regarded as a representative symbol, esp. of a culture or movement; a person, institution, etc., considered worthy of admiration or respect" (oed.com accessed 10<sup>th</sup> December 2020). While Tomaselli and Scott in the book *Cultural Icons*, a seminal text that analyses objects in addition to individuals as cultural icon, understand that cultural icon "encodes the person or object so identified as personifying the exemplar of a particular generation, a stylistic epoch and a feeling about a particular set of social experiences". Two of the important ways in which a cultural icon functions are, first as they may be invested with "religious significance"; second, objects or individuals over the time amass themselves with an exemplary status which may be socio-cultural or even political ("Introduction: Cultural icons" Scott and Tomaselli np.). In this regard the varied adaptations of the narrative of Mirabai through time has also influenced her visual representation through iconography. Furthermore, Mira's narratives perpetuated and popularised by various mediums have also seeped into socio-religious practices. First, in the arena of performance her poems have been explored by *bhajan* groups and sung as both classical and folk songs. Secondly, Mirabai dolls have become a staple in the houses of people, often made with paper-mache or porcelain. Mirabai dolls are shown to be lost in a trace with half closed eyes, clad in a pure white ensemble, plucking the *ektara* (a single stringed instrument). In the last few decades Mirabai dolls have also been featured during the *Golu* festival, the pan South Indian doll festival featuring clay dolls of gods and goddesses. Mira dolls have become a symbol of unconditional love and devotion or *bhakti*; she is raised to the status of a goddess and is displayed among the other gods and goddesses. Although Mira's many representations and re-imaginings into various forms of popular cultural forms have gradually assimilated as a cultural icon, this study argues that folk cultural icon is a more appropriate status in the case of Mira whose stories and songs have been told and retold, been adapted and reimagined, thus resulting in multiple perspectives and interpretations.

## Conclusion

South Asian saint tradition perpetuates the formation of a saint based on the person's popular appeal rather than an institutionalized canonization as it is in the West. Therefore, popular culture plays a significant role in shaping our world views and the domain of religion especially the modalities of *bhakti* within the context of this study. This paper illustrates through an intermediality approach the ways in which Mira is woven into the cultural imagination more specifically through the textual mediums *Cuckold* and the Comic Book *Mirabai*. It demonstrates how the created chronotopes in the different mediums facilitate this *bhakti* saint to escape from her hagiographical confinements and traverse the boundaries of folk and popular thereby shaping Mira the saint into Mira, the folk cultural icon. As Nancy Martin rightly puts it, the reason for Mira's huge popularity ascribes to the relatability. Being a woman hailing from an upper caste, she associates with people of other castes and renounces her privileges for her one true love Krishna. Moreover, by accepting Raidas a leather craftsman as her guru Mira transgresses caste and class hierarchies by following an alternative system where status is only measured through the extent of devotion. Furthermore, Mira's narratives that exemplify her struggle against the evils of patriarchy and societal restrictions, are relatable to all. Her *bhakti* compositions exemplifying passionate love for Krishna, characterized by *madhurya bhava*, entailing romantic love and the pangs of separation, are the stuff that women identify themselves ("Mirabai and Her Poetry," Martin 244). Thus, Mira despite being a saint figure, comes close to reality, hers is a life enveloped with societal oppression, slandering and conspiracy. She is in essence a woman in love struggling to live a life as a devotee, challenging norms, transgressing pre-conceived expectations (Martin 245).

The two texts, in their totality gradually assimilate Mira into the popular imagination as a folk cultural icon. The legend of Meera, her passionate *bhajans* to Lord Krishna have travelled across the country, thereby conferring upon her the status of *a folk cultural icon*. In the postmodern conditions the domains of folklore and popular culture have blurred. Such a reading can propel further research in not just examining Mirabai but also other *bhakti* saints in various digital as well as textual mediums. One fine example of a religious figure attaining iconic stature in folk culture, is Mira.

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## “Forbidden Text”: Adivasi Women, Exploitation and Agency

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### *Abstract*

*Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar’s collection of short stories The Adivasi Will not Dance (2017) was banned from circulation by the Jharkhand state government when the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), led by Sita Soren and other tribal groups alleged pornographic and disrespectful representation of Adivasi women in the book. The ban was however lifted in December 2017, and since its free circulation, the book has received positive critical reviews. In the context of the ban and the allegations of “pornography” raised by the protestors, this article attempts to undertake a critical analysis of the narrative and the ways in which it seeks to represent and locate the Adivasi woman within the context of historical injustices and oppressions that the Adivasi community in India has been subjected to. It will also undertake close textual analysis of select stories from Shekhar’s aforementioned collection to understand the ways in which categories of class, gender and socio-cultural marginalization intersect in the lives of adivasis, especially of Adivasi women. It refers to popular journalistic discourses to understand the nature of criticism against the book’s contents and to argue that the political potential of the subjectivities of Adivasi women remains not in their depiction as victims of the complex of oppressions that are part of their lived experiences. We then recognize in Adivasi women the potential to be agents of their own destiny and determination despite of exploitative structures and practices.*

*Keywords: Adivasi, exploitation, identity, representation, women*

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### **Introduction**

Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar’s collection of short stories *The Adivasi Will not Dance* (2017) was banned from circulation by the Jharkhand state government on 11<sup>th</sup> August 2017 when the *Jharkhand Mukti Morcha* (JMM), led by Sita Soren and other tribal groups alleged pornographic and disrespectful representation of Adivasi women in the book. The ban was however lifted in December 2017, and since its free circulation, the book has received positive critical reviews. In the context of the ban and the allegations of “pornography” raised by the protestors, this article attempts to undertake a critical analysis of the narrative and the ways in which it seeks to represent and locate the Adivasi woman within the context of historical injustices and oppressions that the Adivasi community in India has been subjected to. It will undertake close textual analysis of select stories from Shekhar’s aforementioned collection to understand the ways in which categories of class, gender and socio-cultural marginalization intersect in the lives of Adivasis, especially of Adivasi women. It refers to popular journalistic discourses to understand the nature of criticism against the book’s contents and to argue that the political potential of the subjectivities of

Adivasi women remains not in their depiction as victims of the complex patterns of oppressions that are part of their lived experiences. We then recognize in Adivasi women the potential to be agents of their own destiny and determination despite the exploitative structures and practices.

## Background of the Study

Adivasis in India constitute more than 8 percent of the entire population, comprising of over 700 scheduled tribal groups spread across the various states. They are the original inhabitants of the land, who have unique and distinct culture, language, religion, socio-political systems and live mostly in the rural areas, especially in the forests, mountains and hills. Their main occupation is to gather the forest produce; they depend on forests for their livelihood and protect the forests from the intervention of outsiders. Adivasis in India have contributed consistently in terms of culture, literature and art forms alongside saving the wildlife and forest conservation with their immense lived experiences. However, Indian states' policies and interventions into Adivasi settlements have made these communities victims of globalisation and liberalisation that exploited and destroyed the very own social, ecological and political systems of the Adivasi community. In the present days, the situation has neither changed nor improved to uplift these communities. Like any other marginalised women, the Adivasi women are the most affected people who are at the receiving end of the social hierarchy. High illiteracy among Adivasi women has made them go through various challenges and problems in terms of malnutrition, reproductive health, human trafficking, militarisation, extortion, sexual harassment and physical abuse, both by the dominant socio-political groups and Indian state agencies.

Jharkhand is a state which was formed on 15 November 2000 after a sustained movement for statehood, from the already existing state of Bihar, for over fifty years. It has a strong Adivasi population of about 30 percent of the total population of the state (Census of India, 2011). Though there are other political parties in the state, the Adivasis, especially the Santhal community, express their collective political aspirations and ambitions usually through the consolidation of their votes for the *Jharkhand Mukti Morcha* (JMM), which is a major political force in the state. Jharkhand is a state that has one of the highest mineral deposits in the country. It also has about 40% of its population living below the poverty line. The author of the book, Sahitya Akademi Yuva Puraskar awardee Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, is a doctor by profession and is also associated with the government of Jharkhand. He has been instrumental in writing stories and novels about the Santhals to openly showcase the issues and injustices pertaining to Adivasis. His works, which mainly focus on the self-generated narratives defined by deeply rooted experiential dimensions, include *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* (2014) and *My Father's Garden* (2018). He also authored books for children of nine years and above.

*The Adivasi Will Not Dance* is a collection of ten short stories which engages with the life, culture, identity and politics of the Santhals, an Adivasi community of Jharkhand. The stories in the collection narrate the ways in which the lives of Adivasis are in constant negotiation with disturbing and distressing social and political situations, through coercion, violence and exploitation. The eponymous title story of the book *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* is the last short story in the collection. It is intense and heart-wrenching and alludes to an old

man, a musician, Mangal Murmu, who refuses to perform for the President of India at the inaugural function of the thermal power plant project in Godda area of Jharkhand. Murmu, in his narrative, declares that "we will not dance anymore" (170) and speaks out the reason why his troupe will not sing and dance at the inaugural ceremony because building the thermal power plant in their territory will destroy the very existence of the Adivasis by forcing them out of their lands. This further alienates and pushes them into extreme poverty, hence it "will be the end of us all, the end of all the adivasis" (187). This short story indicates the exploitative nature of the state and industrialists towards Adivasis, by displacing them in the name of development that changes the fate of million Adivasis and makes them homeless and the 'other' of society. Inspired by agitations and protests to defy the project during 2013, the author also raises concerns and documents several deep-rooted issues including coercions, atrocities, tyrannies, sexual assaults perpetuated against the Adivasi women.

"They Eat Meat!" is the first story of the collection and it talks about a Santhali couple who has been transferred to Vadodara from Bhubaneswar where they were instructed to give up their habit of eating meat and hide their tribal identity. Another short story "Sons" is about a corrupt bank manager's family and his cousin's humble family, which narrates differences among a poor and spoiled child, and the life and characters of Santhals. "Getting Even" is about the human trafficking of lower caste women and also the false charges of rape of a four-year-old girl that has been framed against a nine-year-old boy. "Eating with the Enemy" portrays the bonding and relationship between Sulochana and her husband's other wife, Mohini. "Blue Baby" presents the story of a woman namely Githa and her love and betrayal by conceiving a child with her lover. "Baso-jhi" describes an old widowed woman who is considered a witch and depicts her frightening and painful experiences of superstition and social ostracization. The eighth story, "Desire, Divination and Death" is another important tale that presents the chronicles of Subhasini and the loss of her son due to an illness and the feeling of fear, guilt and experiences of one's own consciousness that reflects on reason and reality.

The narratives in this anthology give a voice of resistance for the struggles and movements of Adivasis in general, and the Adivasi women in particular. The book raises pertinent questions about the violence, exploitation and extortion of Adivasi women, but various political and tribal groups including *Jharkhand Mukti Morcha* (JMM) had objected to the book from being circulated for denigrating the Adivasi life, culture and Santhal women in an objectionable pornographic and disrespectful manner. Alleging disrespectful representation of Adivasi women by Shekar's detractors, the committee constituted by the Government of Jharkhand, had looked into the text and found nothing objectionable in the book and withdrew the ban on the book in the month of December 2017.

According to Sanjay Srivastava, whose political commentary on the politics of the ban appeared in *The Hindustan Times*,

...the story that has caused the greatest offense is entitled "November is the Month of Migrations". A brief-but-powerful tale of power and powerlessness, it tells of a penurious Santhal family on its annual work-related migration from Jharkhand to West Bengal. The family is waiting for a train to take them away from their local misery to a distant one. Talamai, one of the daughters, is beckoned by a man-a non-Santhali policeman-who holds a bread pakoda in his hands. Talamai is hungry and her family has no food to offer. The policeman offers food in exchange for sex.

Talamai endures the encounter as she has earlier learned to do. She eats the pakodas, tucks away a Rs 50 note that the policeman gives her and returns to join her family. A routine affair conditioned by the circumstances of power and powerlessness. ("Ban on the Adivasi")

The current paper will focus on two short stories selected from the book – "November is the Month of Migrations" and "Merely a Whore". Based on the analysis of these two stories, the paper seeks to understand the representation of the lives of Adivasis, especially of Adivasi women, within the context of the historical injustice, dehumanisation, exploitation and objectification of the woman's body and labour. The first story, as elucidated above, was at the heart of the controversy surrounding the ban of the book. The paper initially questions the allegation of pornography and rather understands the narrative as a nuanced depiction of the negotiation with precarity faced by Adivasi women in their everyday lives. Following this, the paper analyses the possibility of moving from objectification to self-determination for an Adivasi woman in the story "Merely a Whore."

### **Pornography or Precarity?**

"November is the Month of Migrations" is an important narrative of the degree of dehumanization that marginalized, displaced and impoverished communities, such as those that Adivasis are forced to endure. Talamai has to prostitute herself to a non-Santhal policeman for a piece of bread and a meagre 50 rupees. The sexual encounter (apparently consensual) is depicted with explicit detail, leading to objections from a number of Adivasi groups that an Adivasi woman has been depicted in an obscene and vulgar manner, thereby subjecting her to 'disreputable' and 'disrespectable' representation. However, these arguments raised by the protestors do not take in to account the complex issues that the narrative raises; issues that are related to questions of power, violence, sexuality and gender. Most of the criticisms do not take issue with the representation of the policeman, whose function in the narrative is to clearly demarcate a complex of privileges; that of the impunity of state power and violence, the privileges of a secure class position, male dominance, age and a social capital that is not limited by the Adivasi identity. Although Talamai agrees to enter into a consensual sexual contract with the policeman, what are the terms of this contract, and what does consent mean in a social framework of interaction where the balance of power not only privileges the policeman but also protects him from any kind of accountability. Talamai, as we see, is not in any position to negotiate the terms of the contract. The value of her sexual labour and her body are unilaterally decided by the policeman. If he were to offer more, one may only go to the extent of describing him as a benevolent oppressor, no less. The policeman is enabled by his various privileges to exploit a young, impoverished Adivasi girl, and it is her lack of privileges that does not leave her in a position to say "no". And we raise the question again, "what, then, does consent entail in such circumstances?" This paper accesses the issues of power and inequality through the framework of 'consent'. The author enables us to understand that 'consent' can be simplified to a mere binary of 'yes' and 'no' only in circumstances of equality. The inability to assert one's desire or lack of it exists in an environment of power. The media has socialized us to only 'see' visible exertions of power through spectacular acts of coercion, violence, compulsion and exploitation. The author narrativizes to us, through a short story such as this

that power can function in invisible and insidious ways, through apparent consent. Talamai did not refuse his offer. Talamai 'enthusiastically' agreed to the terms of the bargain. Whose depravity does this reflect upon? Hers, or the policeman who is clearly aware of his privileges when he chooses to exploit Talamai's sexual labour.

The sexual exploitation of Talamai, in this context, needs to be understood as a reflection of inherent systems of social hierarchy and power dynamics in Jharkhand. The seemingly casual nature in which the policeman elicits sexual labour from an Adivasi woman reveals how such systems of domination are normalized. In her book, *Violence, Law and Women's Rights in South Asia*, Goonesekere explains that "The dominant forms of masculinity and femininity are powerful, however men mostly employ violence and rape to preserve their position of power on certain communities" (71). Talamai's experience shows the vulnerability of Adivasi women who have to constantly go through such unavoidable acts of compulsion, violence and exploitation by the dominant agencies across the country.

A report in the online news portal *Scroll.in* (quoted below) specifies for us the precise nature of objections raised by Adivasi groups in Jharkhand following its release:

The matter (of the ban) was raised in the Jharkhand Assembly on Friday by Opposition leader Sita Soren. The Santhal legislator said the book insulted the women of the tribe, and that the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha demand a ban on the book...Earlier, critics and online trolls had accused Shekhar of objectifying and exploiting Adivasi women, and alleged that his writing is "pure porn". On August 4, his detractors had burnt his effigy and copies of two of his books-*The Adivasi will Not Dance* and *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* (Sahitya Akademi Award winner, 2014). ("Jharkhand Government Bans")

The entire issue raised around "objectification" and "exploitation" in the representation of Adivasi women chooses to miss the socio-political context which the narrative reproduces and within which the Adivasi women and their historically dehumanized lives are depicted. One may go as far as to argue that the reader will see what her own framework permits her to see. If the framework through which the text is being accessed is a pre-given one; that heavily depends on the anxieties of a certain kind of morality (often perverse in itself, in how it recognizes and understands the 'other'), then it is bound by the narrowness of its perspective to see only what it chooses to see or it can see. While, to many, this may appear to be a story of victimization of an Adivasi girl, it is also a narrative of her agency, of how she chooses to deploy her body for not only her survival but that of her family. The notion of choice itself is something that aligns itself with that of power and privileges. In conditions of empowerment, a woman has a range of choices available to her. It is in such circumstances that what one chooses to do becomes a matter of ethics. Pointing one's gaze from a privileged perspective often entails the evaluation of the choice to put up one's sexual labour for sale as an immoral or unethical one.

But what about circumstances where one's sexual labour or body as a sexual being is the only capital available to ensure one's survival? In that case, one can neither consider Talamai a victim, because she undertakes to do what she has to for her and her family's survival, nor should her act be evaluated within a framework of moral superiority. However, the policeman who chooses to acquire her services must be held accountable, not as an individual but as someone who wields the privileges and securities offered by an exploitative system and unequal social structure that permits him to perpetuate exploitative acts against

have-nots. Therefore, if the author's narrative is being denounced for its pornographic imagery, such denunciation misses the complex frameworks of power and inequality within which such imagery has been constructed. Additionally, what has been interesting for this paper is the specific allegation of "pornographic" visualisation made against the author.

According to Srivastava for instance, "*The Adivasi Will Not Dance*, a book of short stories by Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, has been banned by the Jharkhand government on the grounds that it is offensive to the dignity of Santhal women. Some also allege that it is pornographic" ("Ban on the Adivasi"). Pornography is part of a visual, auditory and literary culture that is meant to invoke sexual pleasure. Largely, the kind of pornography available has led to the normalization of the relationship between pleasure and the misogynistic treatment and objectification of women, especially women of non-dominant identities. Those with internalized misogyny will therefore draw on the promise of pleasure offered by pornography that is marketed on the objectification of women. However, the significant question remains, is "what Shekhar, the author has achieved in his narrative that may be understood as "pornographic"? Taken away from its politically loaded context, only a readership with such internalized misogyny will identify his narrative of the sexual act as pornography, as something which is meant to invoke pleasure in the misogynistic consciousness through the objectification of structurally oppressed women such as Talamai. This paper however recognizes that in the alleged reproduction of pornographic imagery there are complex questions about objectification and pleasure. To us, the text comes across as the author's challenge to a caste and patriarchy-ridden consciousness to derive pleasure from what is clearly an exploitation of a woman's body and labour.

### **From Objectification to Self-Determination**

"Merely a Whore" is another short story where Shekhar deals with conditions within which women's sexual labour is exploited. Quoting from the text,

In another part of this slum, women too eat out of their sweat and labour. Only, it is also mixed with the semen and sweat of men. They toil inside their own abysses eight-feet-by-eight-feet rooms painted in garish blue and green; curtained off with old terry-cotton sarees; illuminated by hundred –watt bulbs; the hormone-generated heat doused by ceiling fans and colossal desert coolers. This is a routine *they* follow day after day, week after week, year after year.

Everything is on sale here: bodies, companionship. All one needs to do is to keep paying... Once inside, the houris of Lakkhipur take over.

But not every houri could hope to become Sona, the brightest star of Jharna-di's house. Sona was a dream; everyone else was merely a whore.

The others would just spread their legs and their work was done. Sona would unlock the very gates of a palace of pleasures and invite her customers within as honoured guests... That was what Sona learnt early and honed to perfection—the art of making a man happy, the art of satisfying a customer. (144-145)

At the centre of this story is Sona, a young girl who is brought to Lakkhipur, to be employed for prostitution. As per his norm, Shekhar firmly locates the narrative within the broader history of hardships and struggles of the people of Lakkhipur, as well as that of the business of prostitution that grew there. "Villages fell, a town rose: Lakkhipur, the coal-mine town.

Mud-houses fell, concrete ones mushroomed. Roads, police outposts, a railway station, a bus depot, shops, market, a slum and the busiest red-light area in the whole of the mining zone" (147). Prostitution as work premised on the objectification and exploitation of women is given to us in the context of the simultaneous downfall of erstwhile feudal regimes and the fast growing industrialization of the town of Lakkhipur, which was, only a generation back, a village. Shekhar therefore, connects the particular nature of dehumanization to growing poverty and the denigration of human values in the rich and the privileged who then exploit and determine the lives of the oppressed around them.

Sona's value as a prostitute is greater than others not only because of the way she looks but also because of the apparent sexual malleability and skills she performs. Quoting from the text, "Jharna sometimes wondered where Sona came from and what her real name was. But she couldn't ask questions and Sona never shared anything with anyone. She preferred the present, not the past or the future" (149). During the course of the story, we will find out that the possibility of a future is not something that a "whore" such as Sona can even envision without being violently reminded of her dehumanization. This story reminds us of the shortcomings of the contemporary feminist movement in India that focuses largely on the issues confronted by the privileged women (that of class, caste and regional locations) and in the process of centring themselves often dismiss and erase the position of women who are lower class and caste, Adivasi and are located in marginal regional locations. Sona's dehumanization is multiplied by not only the fact that she is a woman, but also that she is a prostitute (a woman who sells sexual as well as emotional labour for money).

Sona becomes emotionally attached to one of her "regulars" called Nirmal. Among the regulars at Jharna-di's was a young transporter called Nirmal. He must be twenty-eight or thirty, tall, dark and posh, with refined tastes. He was a bodybuilder, and a hulking man...Nirmal dressed in white, ironed shirts, tight corduroy pants, and big boots. A beret and Ray-Ban aviators completed his look...She loved his voice. It was deep, and like his body, muscular and strong. Nirmal's voice made Sona swoon. She could remember the smell of no other man but Nirmal, she could smell on her sheets even after she had slept with ten men (149-150).

When it came to Nirmal, Sona did not interact with him like her other clients. Her engagement with him involved her active desire, both physical as well as emotional. Shekhar narrativizes, in some detail, the moments of intimacy between the two that did not involve only sexual intimacy but a sort of camaraderie that made their physical connection even more pleasurable.

All of this seemed very strange to Sona. The things that Nirmal did to her, for her...She began imagining a scenario in which Nirmal wanted to more than just fuck her. Sona allowed herself the tiny sliver of a chance that she could have a life away from this daily procession of men, away from the constant nakedness, the competition in Jharna-dis house, a life of sickness and solitude once her time was up. She began dreaming of a life in which both Nirmal and she could be fully dressed and walking on the streets of Lakkhipur, hand in hand, laughing and talking freely, not whispering to each other lying naked in Sona's tiny curtained cubicle. (152)

All of this about Nirmal is something that we see only through Sona's perspective. We soon realize that there is more to Nirmal that is not visible to her. The only thing that is amiss as far as she is concerned is his persisting reluctance to kiss her on the mouth. Nirmal,

we learn from the author's narrative is not new to exploitative sexual interactions with women. And these are aspects of his life that he does not make visible to Sona. She sees only as much he will show and perform before her. Sona goes against her own instincts and the stern advices of Jharna-di and allows herself to be further emotionally immersed in Nirmal, hoping that he had plans for more with her.

Eventually Nirmal reminds her violently that he expects nothing more from her than the services of a prostitute, whose sexual labour is paid for. Again, this story can spontaneously be read as Sona's pathetic victimization. But it is also the narrative of a woman who takes the decision to desire and act upon it as well. The text shows the ways Shekhar is insightful of how a woman, especially an oppressed woman is dehumanized in a socially stigmatized kind of work, i.e. prostitution.

"Merely a Whore," yet again could have been charged with pornographic representation, but what Shekhar's explicit sexual imagery does is to draw a picture of the nature of intimacy that they shared. It would appear that the time spent between them was not only one that could be characterized as one of merely business. And yet in the end, for Nirmal, it was nothing more than that. Shekhar draws a vivid picture of Nirmal's misogynistic masculinity, expressed not only through his muscular body, his voice, his apparently protective nature but also in the ways that he is regarded and upheld by his male friends, cohorts and subordinates.

## Conclusion

Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's work is seminal in the way that it addresses the dynamics of power, assertion and struggle in the lives of Adivasis in general and Adivasi women in specific. Each story is located in the context of the socio-political transformations of contemporary India. Although each of his stories delves intimately into the lives and minds of his characters, they are part of Indian history as it has taken place in the last two to three decades. And this is not history that is taught to us through mainstream school and university text books. History given to us by Shekhar is history as it is seen and experienced by the men and the women in the margins.

This paper has attempted to take up the issues raised by the ban on the book and introspected on the more complex questions that the allegations leading to the ban have not been able to engage with. The lives depicted by Shekhar are those of the most marginalized. He attempts to narrativize their existence and experience as part of historical happenings that often forget to take them in to account. These are the stories of people who it would appear have very little anchor on their destiny, and the course of their lives. Shekhar writes of their agency in a world that renders them invisible, made visible only to be exploited. The narrative firmly locates and describes the characters as agents of their own choices, limited as they may be, making their lives, experiences and aspirations visible, not as victims but as makers and warriors of their own intent and purposes.



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## **Myths and Indian English Drama: A Critical Appraisal of Girish Karnad's *Tale-Danda***

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### *Abstract*

*An evaluation of chronological evolution of drama convinces that fables provided by myths constitute its crux. The origin of dramatic literatures and performances can be attributed to the religious instincts of mankind in various civilizations and various cultures. English dramatic literature too emerged as an offshoot of the liturgy and the religious performances as a part of the church services. The contemporary Indian English drama deals with social problems, political issues, philosophical views, psychological affairs and religious convictions etc. through myths, legends and historical events. The concept of Girish Karnad's revolutionary play Tale-Danda seems to have been borrowed from a historical movement started by a group of enlightened poets, philosophers, mystics and social revolutionaries with an intention to awaken the slumbering society against the ages-old malpractice of caste system. These revolutionaries opposed any kind of static and conservative practices in society, condemned idolatry and temple worship and had firm faith in gender equality and dignity of hard work. As a consequence of their committed and constant agitation against the firmly rooted caste system they had to bear humiliation, rage and displeasure of the orthodox community, and finally, the movement came to its end in the form of terror and slaughter.*

*Keywords: Myth, Varna system, Orthodox community, Social revolutionaries, Darkened society.*

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Myth seems to have been a very significant and an inseparable part of human psychology and society from the time immemorial. Originated from the Greek word *mythos*, "myth" has travelled a long way passing through various levels and stages of interpretations and explanations. As per general interpretation myth stands for something that is false, fictitious and having no relation with reality and history. Bronislaw Malinowski observes myth as "a narrative resurrection of primeval reality, told in satisfaction of deep religious wants, moral cravings, social submissions, assertions, even practical requirements" (78-9). Further myth can be defined as "traditional story usually involving supernatural or imaginary people and embodying popular ideas on natural or social phenomena" (Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus 494). Lillian Feder explains myth as "a story involving human limitation and superhuman strivings and accomplishments which suggests through action – usually a ritual, ceremonial, or compulsive nature – man's attempt to express and thus control his own anxiety about those features of his physiological and psychological make-up and his external

environment which he cannot comprehend, accept, or master. The character of myth may be gods, men or monstrous creatures with the qualities both, but even in myths dealing exclusively with immortals, the narrative material, the portrayal of conflict and sorrow, and the resolution or revelation are reflections of human concerns” (11). As far as the themes of myth are regarded, Lillian Feder further observes that they “express man’s fear of and awe at the mysterious cycle of the death and rebirth of the year and his involvement in the mystery of his own birth, nature and death” (11).

Myth, “being a traditional story of unknown origin handed down from earliest times, has close resemblance with legend” (Nand Kumar 5). Though the words, “myth” and “legend”, “frequently are used interchangeably, a *myth* properly deals with gods and a *legend* with men. Myths and legends are types of folklore.... Myths embody the primitive beliefs of peoples and provided a romantic explanation of the wonders of nature when scientific explanations were lacking. Natural forces were personified and deified” (*New Standard Encyclopedia* 649).

Now the question arises, is all imaginative literature mythical? It can comprehensively be stated that all imaginative literature can never be taken as mythical, nor can all myths be regarded as literature. The presentation of myth in literature or in any work of art should not be thought to be inauthentic or of secondary worth. “It is by virtue of myths that the literature created throughout the world for centuries has gained its permanent value and significance” (Nand Kumar 7). It can be assumed that the works of art by great literary personalities, around the globe, as Homer, Virgil, Shakespeare, Milton, Kālidās, Rabindra Nath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, T.P.Kailasam, Girish Karnad and many others have been able to acquire a place, they are on, largely because of their mythical themes and characters.

As far as the history of Indian dramatic literature is concerned, it seems to date back to the Vedic period. *The Rigveda*, being the most ancient among Indian literary pieces and the earliest of all the *Vedas*, appears to be a place where the roots of Indian dramatic culture can be found. *The Samhita* in the *Rigveda* having fifteen hymns written in a dialogue form seems to provide substantial material for drama. Referring to Bharata’s *Natyashastra* Girish Karnad observes the emergence of drama as follows:

The first chapter of Bharata’s *Natyashastra* gives us the myth of the origin of drama. The chapter itself has been attributed to 500 BC though the other chapters of the book may be of later date.

It was a time when the moral fibre of society had weakened, irrational passions held sway and people had surrendered themselves to their baser instincts. Knowledge of the *Vedas* (which presumably could have saved the situation) being restricted to the upper strata of the society, a medium was required that entertained and could restore the health of the society by reaching out to all the people, regardless of their position in the social hierarchy. On being implored by Indra and the other gods to provide such an instrument, Brahma, the Father of the Universe, took the text from the *Rigveda*, the art of performance from the *Yajurveda*, the song from the *Samveda* and *rasa* (aesthetic experience) from the *Atharvaveda* and created a fifth *Veda* called *Natyaveda*. (Girish Karnad 70)

From the earliest times myth has ever been a very significant source of inspiration for world literature. If we go through a chronological study of the development of drama, it seems to be dependent upon the fables provided by the myths. As far as Indian English drama is concerned, it can be stated that Indian English drama has completed the journey of

more than hundred years from its very beginning. Indian English drama deals with social problems, political issues, philosophical views, psychological affairs, religious convictions etc. through myths, legends and historical events. Among the Indian English dramatists Rabindra Nath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, T.P.Kailasam, Girish Karnad, Badal Sircar, Uma Parmeshwaran and Mahesh Dattani have comprehensively and frequently used Indian as well as foreign myths in their works, especially in their plays. The Indian epics *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* are the perennial sources where these Indian English playwrights owe to.

Girish Karnad's *Tale-Danda* (1990), literally Death by Beheading, is a revolutionary play which negates the Indian 'caste system,' an outcome of a Hindu myth propounding the theory of the birth of human beings from the different parts of Lord *Brahma*, the God of Creation. As this myth says, the *Brahmins* (priests, teachers, poets and ministers) were originated from the mouth of *Brahma*; *Kshatriyas* (kings and warriors) from His arms; from the thighs Lord *Brahma* created *Vaishyas* (the tradesmen), and *Shudras* (craftsmen) and *Panchamas* (menial workers) are thought to have been emanated by *Brahma* from His feet. In ancient Hindu society these four classes of human beings were recognized as four *Varnas*. With the passage of time this *Varna* system has been degenerated into 'caste-system.' Such myths and literature, as created and popularized by the *Brahmins*, seek to justify the social hierarchy and sanction their superiority to the extent as Manu says, "A *Brahmin* may compel a *Shudra*, whether bought or unbought, to do service work; for he is created by the Creator to be the slave of a *Brahmin*" (*Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches* 418). Hence, in Indian society the only occupation of the *Shudras*, as prescribed by the Lord, has been thought to serve meekly the other three castes. As cited from *The Institutes of Hindu Law: Or, The Ordinances of Manu*:

One principal duty the supreme Ruler assigns to a sudra; namely, to serve the before mentioned classes, without depreciating their worth. (Chapter 1 Shloka 91, p.12)

The concept of the play *Tale-Danda*, seems to have been borrowed by the playwright from a historical movement that took place in the city of Kalyan in North Karara in the year 1168 AD. This movement was started by a group of enlightened poets, philosophers, mystics and social revolutionaries with an intention to awaken the darkened society against the ages-old malpractice of caste system. It resulted in an age of creativity, courageous questioning and social commitment which was unmatched in the entire history of Kannada. These revolutionaries would use, not Sanskrit, but the local dialects and the language of common people to interact with them and discuss about God and religion. They opposed any kind of static and conservative practices in society and even condemned idolatry and temple worship. They had firm faith in gender equality and dignity of hard work. Because of their committed and constant agitation against the firmly rooted caste system they had to bear humiliation, rage and displeasure of the orthodox community, and finally, the movement came to its end in the form of terror and slaughter.

Girish Karnad wrote *Tale-Danda*, "in 1989 when the Mandir and the Mandal movements were beginning to show again how relevant the questions posed by these thinkers were for our age. The horror of subsequent events and the religious fanatics that gripped Indian national life today have only proved how dangerous it is to ignore the solution they offered" (Girish Karnad "Preface"). The social revolutionaries, change-bringers, poets, thinkers, scholars and philosophers in the play firmly oppose the established

norms and regulations that deprive a human being of his freedom and opportunities to rise and progress simply in the name of caste system, which itself has emerged as a social deformity from the age-old Hindu myth of the origin of human beings from particular body parts of Lord Brahma. The play *Tale-Danda* represents a king named Bijjala ruling over the kingdom of Kalyan. In fact, the king is a *Shudra*, a barber by caste. Though not being a *Kshatriya* by birth Bijjala possesses all the characteristics of being originated from the arms of the mythical *Brahma*. Bijjala himself narrates the whole process of becoming *Kshatriya* as follows:

For ten generations my forefathers ravaged the land as robber barons. For another five they ruled as the trusted feudatories of the Emperor himself. They married into every royal family in sight. Bribe generations of Brahmins with millions of cows. All this so they could have the caste of *Kshatriya* branded on their foreheads. (Girish Karnad 14)

Caste-consciousness pervades the whole atmosphere of the play. The people belonging to higher caste do not pay due regards to Bijjala, though he is a king of Kalyan. He himself relates the insulting attitude of the orthodox Hindus towards the lower caste people, "In all my sixty-two years, the only people who have looked me in the eye without a reference to my lowly birth lurking deep on their eyes are the *sharanas*: Basavanna and his men" (Girish Karnad 15). Basavanna is the King's officer and a great poet-philosopher also. He gets all the enlightened people united and raises a voice for equality. Basavanna and all his men shed their castes and become *sharanas* or devotees of Lord Shiva. They take their body as the very abode of God, and idolatry as meaningless. They refute all the prevalent inhuman traditions, and believe in social and gender equality. Whatever prosperity is seen in the kingdom of Kalyan, it is all because of these *sharanas*, who are dedicated people.

With a purpose to highlight the caste-consciousness, derived from the Hindu myth of the origin of various classes of people, Girish Karnad presents an episode of marriage between Kalawati, a Brahmin girl, and Sheelvanta, an untouchable boy. Basavanna hesitates to comment upon this event and come forward to support this bold step. The *sharanas* do not like this attitude of Basavanna; but Basavanna has his own apprehension, "It's a question of life and death for these children. From tomorrow the wrath of the bigoted will pursue them like a swarm of snakes, to strike as they pause to put up a roof or light an oven. Who will protect them then?" (Girish Karnad 38). *Sharanas* are not ready, at any cost, to surrender before any of the arguments against this inter-caste marriage. One of the *sharanas* asks Basavanna boldly, "So how many more generations have to roll by before a cobbler marries a Brahmin?" (Girish Karnad 44). The celebration of this inter-caste marriage makes the *sharanas* feel overjoyed as they are winner; while the orthodox Hindus feel defeated and get infuriated. The social conditions in Kalyan get changed rapidly; and the situation deteriorates day by day. A fatal conspiracy is planned against King Bijjala by his own son Somideva and his accomplices, Damodar and Manchanna. His loyal servants are brutally murdered; and in his own palace Bijjala is imprisoned. Basavanna advises Bijjala to cling to Lord Shiva who alone can save him from any danger.

Damodar and Manchanna advise Sovideva to kill the *sharanas*; and he does it mercilessly and brutally. Hence, enraged Jagdeva and other *sharanas*, with an intention to avenge the massacre on Sovideva, rush to the palace, and not finding him there, enter the inner shrine of Lord Shiva where they find the old King, Bijjala, firmly embracing the *Linga*

so as to keep himself safe from any harm. None of the *sharanas* is able to touch him as long as he is clung to Lord Shiva. Jagdeva, anyhow, succeeds, ultimately, to convince him that he and his companions have been sent there by Basavanna. Bijjala, innocent of any mishappening ahead, believes this and comes out of the shrine; and Jagdeva stabs him to death. Here the playwright seems to represent his staunch faith in the mythical Lord Shiva, that Bijjala is safe and out of any danger till he is clung to the *Linga*. This incident also indicates that the evil forces cannot work inside the shrine of Lord Shiva. King Bijjala comes to the brutal end of his life because he leaves the *Linga* and believes the liar. When Sovideva comes to know about the chaotic situation in Kalyan, he considers Damodar to be responsible for all these misdeeds, as rape, murder and rioting, in the city. He gets him killed immediately and instructs his men not to let the *sharanas* escape; and to finish them and expel them from this land. Amidst the wails and groans of the people of Kalyan Sovideva is crowned.

In brief, it can be said that in *Tale-Danda*, Girish Karnad artistically shapes and beautifully develops the theme of caste system through particular dramatic situations and characters. In the present times, caste-system, which is an offshoot of the Hindu myth associated with the origin or evolution of four *varnas* – *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas* and *Shudras* – from the mouth, arms, thighs and feet of Lord Brahma respectively, has become a very significant phenomenon of Indian social system. In the play *Tale-Danda* the playwright successfully seems to expose the heinous consequences of this undesirable and discriminating practice deeply rooted in Indian social system. Along with the myth of Lord Brahma Karnad frequently refers to the myth of Lord Shiva too throughout the play. Basavanna seems to be the spokesman of the playwright himself when he says, “Violence is wrong, whatever, the provocation. To resort to it because someone else started it first is even worse. And to do so in the name of structure of brick and mortar is a monument of stupidity” (Girish Karnad 29).

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## Poetry of Dissent and Defiance: A Study of Selected Poems of Pash

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### *Abstract*

*In the embattled post-colonial context, poetry attains an unmistakable political character. Far from being just spiritualized reflection of human experience or predicament, it tends to attain an interventionist edge. The continuous subjugation by the alien outside or the structure of oppression within generates a poetic discourse which militates against the status quo universalism. Nations, communities, races either colonized or marginalized tend to speak through their poets in a voice of unrest and agitation. The existentialist worries, anxieties of alienation or sense of ennui do distress the contemporary Third World poet but what engages his prime attention is the exploitation of people by the dominant powers. In an age of utter chaos and confusion owing to a continual clash between the individual interests and the needs of a society, it becomes necessary to study writings of the poets like Pash who have always paved way for achieving more humane social existence. The present paper aims at studying Pash's contribution to Indian Literature, especially, Punjabi Literature as a poet of protest and dissent.*

*Keywords: Post-colonialism, existentialism, subjugation, marginalization, oppression*

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### **Introduction**

From idealistic perspective, literature particularly poetry, tends to be defined as an expression of subjectivity of the poet — his mind, ego, self and personality, whereas materialistic perspectives portray literature as a reflection of an objective reality, social conditions or a historical epoch. But literature needs to be re-defined as something more than a portrayal of subjective or objective reality, if the writer is seen in a new role — as an instrument of change; its activist propensity to react upon and influence the historical processes of the age gets thrown into sharp focus. The notion that the relationship between literature (superstructure) and socio-political conditions (base) is that of reciprocity, not only defines the role of a writer as an instrument of change, but it also re-defines literature as transmutation or trans-valuation of the (given) values of life and society. It is in this light that this paper aims at studying Punjabi writer Pash's poetry as a call for an entirely new and a better world which transcends all religions, all socio-cultural barriers and all that divides human beings from each other. It is an endeavor to present Pash's poetry as an instrument of assertion, protest and participation and as a great tool for bringing changes in the social order.

A detailed study of the conditions in which Pash undertakes to become a rebel lays bare his and his poetry's engagement with politics. Poetical can be political also and in societies which have suffered subjugation and have all kinds of socially debilitating discriminations within, this kind of overlap is necessary and natural.

### **An Overview of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Punjabi Poetry**

In order to understand the element of protest in Pash's poetry, it becomes necessary to be acquainted with the history of modern Punjabi poetry and socio-political conditions of Punjab. If we closely study the history of Punjabi literature, we find that after India's independence in 1947, Punjabi literature, both thematically and stylistically, is powerfully pushed towards the portrayal of rural realities. Especially, Progressive Punjabi literature had mobilized a large number of writers from amongst the lower and lower middle class, particularly from rural areas, thereby widening the popular base of literary activity. Progressive poetry, which was considered as the poetry of social protest was proclaimed to be poetry of people, by people and for the people. A conscious effort was made to re-discover rural folk forms and myths. A total denial of relevance of the subjective world of human consciousness and aspiration is another characteristic of Progressive poetry. Mohinder Pal Kohli has mentioned in his book, *The Influence of the West on Punjabi Literature*, that after World War 1, intellectuals of the West led by Gorky, Thomas Mann and Forster etc. raised their voice for liberty. "I want freedom ----both as creators and critics--- for the maintenance of culture" (59), Forster had declared. He appealed to the writers to be "courageous and sensitive" (59) in order to be able to fulfill their public calling. Munshi Prem Chand, a renowned Progressive Hindi writer too had expressed his disapproval of art that failed to present truth. He maintained that literature should reflect reality of life and uphold the cause of humanity, nobility and justice.

After the Progressive and Experimental movements, the next important movement, which was confined more or less to poetry, was ultra-leftist in nature. This new type of poetry, popularly known as, revolutionary poetry, resonant with sounds of clanging swords and thick with the 'smell of gun powder' (Singh 151) was very sharp and loud. Jagtar Singh, Pash, Sant Sandhu, Darshan Khatkar and Lal Singh Dil were prominent amongst votaries of this new wave of poetry. The poetry of these poets was inspired by their vision of freedom, prosperity and equality contrasted with penury and misery of the land of their birth. Their poems are remarkable for "articulating a reaction against the sophisticated introvert, highly personalized poetry of the urban poets" (Singh 151). They were writing against the age old long orthodox religious faiths. Cause of communal hatred, accent on caste discrimination and the wide gap between 'haves and have nots' were attributed to the British colonial rule and the policies and beliefs adapted from the colonial period. The solipsistic ideals of high Modernism and sentimental romanticism of earlier decades were challenged and subverted by the new insurrectionary Naxalite poetry. While rejecting usual objective correlatives of love of romantic poetry, the revolutionary poet was replacing the symbols and metaphors like moon, flower, stars and birds with the words like sword, thunder, storm, fire and sun etc., the words which could more effectively communicate the poet's anger and frustration.



## Biographical Sketch of Pash

Pash, whose real name was Avtar Singh Sandhu, was born on September 9, 1950 in Talwandi Salem, a small village on Southern fringe of Doaba region in Punjab. He was born in a Jat Sikh family which had been living in this peripheral village for generations. His father Sohan Singh Sandhu, though poetic and imaginative by nature, had joined the army both to serve the country and to carve out a supplementary source of income for the family. After passing his middle examination and trying out many ventures, Pash finally settled in his village. Simple and serene village life had a deep impact on his young and inquisitive mind. T.S. Gill writes about it in his book, *Makers of Indian Literature*:

If its natural scenario, simple mode of livelihood and seasonal ceremonies had enchanted and enthralled him, its utter poverty, torpor bleakness and its slow and retarded growth had completely disenchanted and disappointed him(3).

During this period, leftist militant movement had spread in Bengal, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh. Isolated and secluded in his village, Pash had started writing, what he termed as “bellowing poetry” (MI 7) and became a votary of armed struggle in Punjab. On May 10, 1970 Pash, who was not even 20 at that time, was arrested for allegedly committing the murder of an owner of a brick kiln and he was kept in prison for more than a year. This experience forced him to reflect deeply upon the concepts of violence, revolution, socialism, cultural heritage, social institutions and political ideologies.

For engendering awakening about their exploitation among the oppressed masses and also to give an ideological direction to their struggle, Pash started publishing a journal named, *Raging Arrows (Rohle Ban)*. But soon he realized, as he has mentioned in his *Letters*, that around it “had conglomerated disparate elements of insurrectionary type” (quoted in MI 7), therefore he completely dissociated himself from it. His other journal called *Furrow (Siarh)*, aimed at publishing literary and cultural issues also came to an unwanted end. As mentioned by Pash himself in his *Letters* that, “since its supporters were mostly unemployed young men, sons of peasants and students themselves incapable of rendering any financial assistance” (quoted in MI 7), this promising venture also died a premature death. The last one to come out was, *Call (Hoka)*, which again on account of financial constraints could not continue for long. Poems in his first collection, *Iron’s Tale (Loh Katha)*, published in 1970, were written under the Naxalite spell and these poems articulate the sighs and wails of the exploited people. The poems in his second collection, *In Pursuit of Flying Hawks (Ud dei Bajan Magar)*, published in 1974, seem to have raised his poetic act to the level of a revolutionary project. His close study of Leon Trotsky, a votary of permanent revolution, had replenished Pash’s view of revolutionary poetry. Poems in his third collection, *In Our Times (Sadei Samian Vich )* published in 1978, have motifs drawn from all walks of life and these poems unravel the role of economy, politics, history, religion and ideology in human life.

Pash’s village background, peasant upbringing and his commitment to human relationships had enabled him to speak on behalf of the village folk with remarkable conviction and clarity. He successfully portrays his emotional responses, awareness of changing relationships, doubts about traditional values and his intense desire to change or renew them. Undeterred and undaunted, Pash would have carried on with educating the village children, in his school, had the socio-political conditions of Punjab not forced him first to leave India and then to his murder by some Sikh extremists. After leaving India, he

had become the editor of *Anti 1947*, a journal which was published in USA and was bitterly opposing the activities of the accomplices of the Sikh terrorists in Punjab. In the very first issue of journal he had offered such a powerful critique of the Sikh terrorists and their accomplices in USA, their evil designs and perverse intentions, that he became an eye-sore for all of them. On March 23, 1988 he was gunned down at his tube well, where he had gone to take bath in the company of his bosom friend, Hans Raj. Thus ended the life of a rebel, who in the poem, "Now I Take Leave of You" (*Main Vida Hunda Haan*), had so poignantly articulated his overflowing desire to love and live:

You drop all this from your mind, my love,  
 Except this  
 That I had intense, longing to live,  
 That neck-deep I wanted to delve in life,  
 You live my share of life, my love,  
 Live my share of life, as well. (Trans. Gill 69)

### Pash's Protest Poetry

The reasons for Naxalite upsurge in Punjab were economic, political, historical and cultural. No doubt, the Green Revolution in Punjab had resulted in doubling the agricultural production, but excessive increase in the prices of fertilizers, pesticides and insecticides had withheld its gains from reaching the small and even medium farmers. Pash, being the poet of farmers, responded to these developments with enthusiasm and vigor. He wrote clearly about this situation in his Diary:

That India be the personal property of a few marauders dealing with the people as if they are buffalos and cows is not at all acceptable to me.....India is close to my heart but closer are the people numbering crores who as labourers and farmers are coerced and dispossessed of all their belongings (quoted in MI 19).

While sharing his views on the idea of national consciousness in postcolonial context, Frantz Fanon, a French theorist and activist, has mentioned in his book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, that national consciousness should not be the end point of the anti colonial mobilization. Once national consciousness is reached, we must rapidly switch from a national consciousness to social and political consciousness (Fanon 165). Fanon, in fact warns against the danger of the capture of postcolonial state by the bourgeois elite. For poets like, Pash and Faiz Ahmed Faiz (a Progressive Urdu poet), national and social emancipation are intertwined. Due to the extreme poverty and helplessness around, even 'the dawn of freedom', after a long anti-colonial struggle, seemed tainted and dim to Faiz. "This leprous daybreak, dawn night's fangs have mangled-/This is not that long -looked-for break of day" (Trans. Kiernan 123), writes Faiz in his poem, "Freedom's Dawn" written in August 1947. The grim picture of the wretched and poor villagers as portrayed by Pash, quite validates Fanon's idea of the subjugation of the postcolonial state. The financial condition of the farmers had worsened further after the Green Revolution. The same situation persists even today. The inability of the small farmers to pay off their loans on time is forcing them to take their lives. While talking about the development of India as a nation in the postcolonial

context, G. J. V. Prasad writes in his essay, “Reply-paid Post colonialism: The Language of English Fiction”:

In theory and sometimes in practice India became “India”- the nation became a negotiable destructible, almost valueless, disabling rather than enabling construct. Its importance was only to the English –speaking urban intelligentsia whose India was never the Bharat that no longer existed, and intelligentsia who had lost their “sub-national” local moorings who needed “India” for their continued position of power (187).

When the Sovereign, Democratic and Republic India failed to provide a life of dignity to people like Pash and those whom he represents, the disillusioned, Pash, no longer wanted to belong to it. While rejecting all the meta-narratives like, ‘unity in diversity’, nationalism and patriotism, Pash writes in the poem, “Bharat”, “When someone of one Bharat speaks/Or national integration flaunts, /His cap in the air to hurl/Is all then that I so much want” (Trans. Gill 01). “Now my Bharat is a sparrow of clay,” he laments in the poem, “On Studying Our Culture” (Trans. Ghai 66). When the nation becomes a place which sustains and provides only for the privileged, India appears to Pash merely “as a tail, on the map of the world”. He writes in his poem, “The Patriot”, “This is India/That hangs on this small-sized globe/Like Asia’s tail/ And looks like a moth” (Trans. Ghai 62). To Pash, ‘India’ no longer seems to be a place of security, peace, satisfaction, self-respect, love and belongingness. The following lines from Pash’s poem, “We Are in Danger,” clearly elucidate his idea of nation:

We had believed our motherland to be something like our home  
Where there is no suffocation  
Where man flows in the streets like rain water  
Swings like wheat stalks in the fields  
And invests the vastness of sky with meaning (Trans. Ghai 173).

Similarly, the naivety, simplicity and nostalgia of a romantic and idealistic type, which is so commonly found in the poems written on country life, are nowhere glorified by Pash. Without making an attempt to eulogize or romanticize the beauty of his poor village, Pash portrays the stark reality of Punjab, in his poem, “The Patriot”:

And this is Punjab  
Where there are neither lawns of soft grass  
Nor trees filled with flowers  
Spring comes but its colour is not bright. (Trans. Ghai 62)

There is nothing beautiful or romantic in his description of the beginning of the day in a village. Instead of the “cooing of doves” (Trans. Gill 18), the day in the poor village begins with the sighing of “Bachna, the addict” (Trans. Gill 18). He writes in the poem, “This Day”:

Nothing began with the cooing of doves  
The day has begun with Bachna , the addict,  
Sighing, for the cat has overturned the bowl

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The day has begun with Karmu’s withering crop. (Trans. Gill 18)

The poetry of Pash is an attempt to portray a struggle for freedom and to engage oneself on one's own terms and to liberate one's life from the bonds of facticity and situation. What is mentioned by Jacques Ranciere, a French philosopher, about the anguish and pain of

the workers, in the *Preface* to his book, *Proletarian Nights*, seems to be true for Pash and his people: “that it was not so much the poverty, the low wages, the comfortless dwellings or the ever present threat of hunger. More fundamentally, it was anguish at the daily theft of their time as they worked wood or stone, sewed clothing or stitched shoes; and all for nothing but the indefinite maintenance of the forces both of servitude and of domination” (Ranciere 10). Pash’s quest is for writing poetry that envisions a different future for his people, in fact, another existence which, as Ranciere would put, is “unbound from the cycle of labor and recuperation for the next day’s labor” (Ranciere 10). “We shall fight on, friend, for the desolate season, /We shall fight on, friend, for enslaved longings, /We shall pick up, friend, the fragments of life. (Trans. Gill 30), asserts Pash, in his poem, “Friend, We Shall Fight On”.

Pash has not only made a significant alteration to the treatment of love in Punjabi poetry but he has also added a new dimension to its application. In the poem, “In Her Name”, the young and passionate lover sacrifices his love for the beloved for some more important and substantial cause. Though the revolutionary lover, who never bows his head in front of anyone, bends down at his beloved’s door, while going to the prison, so intense is the lover’s respect and veneration for the beloved. But more than his beloved, Pash is concerned about his fields, crops and villagers. He declares:

My every joy is tied to the freedom of crops,  
Every peasant’s tale tells the story of your smile,  
My fate is one with the fate of the changing time,  
My tale is but the tale of the shining sword. (Trans. Gill 53)

Pash’s love poems hold out the promises of love poetry’s generic re-orientation in Punjabi poetry. His poems seek to uncover and subvert the motifs popular with the love poets of Punjabi poetry. Pash uses legendary and historical resources in poems like, “Mirza’s Utterance” and “Joga Singh’s Self Analysis”, but he has employed these legends to show how the erotic love and divine sacrifice, so much embedded in Punjabi ethos, are encountered at the modern historical juncture. Pash’s poem, “Mirza’s Utterance”, begins at a stage when he had not yet felt the drive of Eros. Instead of undertaking the challenging task of abducting Sahiban, so as to save her from social abduction, as per the historical resources, Pash’s Mirza is struggling to save himself from his own abduction by the social system through imposition of its economic and social restraints. Pash’s Mirza dreads and asserts, “Before you elope with me /Bread may kidnap we instead” (Trans. Gill 84). Everything, including educational apparatuses and even poetic practices, operate to actualize this abduction. For Pash, thus, erotic love, so much celebrated and glorified in the popular ethos takes a new shape, form and meaning in the modern context, in which more than anything else man is preoccupied with his struggle for survival. Even the word ‘revolution’, which is highly glorified and romanticized in Sikh folk songs and myths, is presented by Pash, in its stark nakedness. Pash states clearly, “*Kranti koi dawat nahin, numaish nahin*” (Trans. Chaman Lal 66). He says:

It is a brutal clash of classes and concepts  
It is killing and being killed  
And the overcoming of death (Trans. Gill 16)

Pash’s poetry is nothing but the representation of the struggles of his people. His poem, “The Flock of Sparrows” (*Chirian da Chamba*) presents how the folk songs, which

are meant to celebrate life, have actually lost their meaning and essence. The actual life, in which scarcity is deeply embedded, shatters the dreams of the poor village girls (MI 61). “Flock of sparrows will not take flight/For some far, far off land (Trans. Gill 88)”, Pash laments in the poem. Similarly, his poems, “Sister’s Song”, “Grass-like Person’s Tale” do take specific motifs from the folklore but rather than “reiterating and reaffirming (MI64)” them he exposes how under the burden of economic restraints and social compulsions, these cultural stereotypes have actually, started suffocating and contaminating their lives. The speaker in the poem, “Grass-like Person’s Tale” cannot visit her sister’s house because “the camel”, which signifies here- social, cultural and economic constraints, has grazed away his identity. “While grazing camels, your loving brother/Is by camels grazed. /Sister! He will never come to see you now (Trans. Gill 113), writes, Pash.

Material inequality and power dynamics of the colonial era have unfortunately, remained unchanged in the postcolonial Indian society. Pash’s poem, “The Wound of the Thorn” focuses on the dehumanized existence of an anonymous, helpless and disillusioned villager, who despite working hard is forced to live a miserable life and has given up all his hopes. Failing to find an exit from this existence, he commits suicide. While portraying his ordeal, Pash writes, “But himself he got eaten without a bet,/Years of his life like ripe melons/Were as such eaten away in full ”(Trans. Gill 55). Written in the same vein Pablo Naruda’s work, *Canto General* presents man’s struggle for justice. Rather than being a mere propagandist, Pash visualized Pablo Naruda as an authentic revolutionary poet. Naruda compares poor people with grain that nourishes the masses. “Lives like maize were threshed in the bottomless/granary of wasted seeds, / as if their subjugation is justified by the needs of the others. He dwells on death which fills people lives daily: “each day a petty death, dust, worm a lamp, /snuffed out in suburban mud”. These “petty” deaths are actually, a stain on humanity, “all of them weakened waiting for their death” (“The Heights of Macchu Picchu”). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her seminal essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” views the fate of the subaltern subject - how she can be marred by the politics of representation. The subaltern subjects like the tailor, teacher, barber, the midwife, the laboureres of Pash’s village, including Pash himself, find no place in the idealistic representations of the village life. These representations always confine the subaltern to the margins, which for the marginalized remains the centre of voicelessness (78). But people living in Pash’s village cease to be subalterns as they have found a voice of their own in his poetry.

Pash’s poem, “Ominous” clearly marks how his poetic art was opening to the new aspects of life, like- mechanical life style and routine, rationalization, sheer professionalism and lack of concerns, emotions, feelings and dreams. Pash says, “Ominous is not the loot of the labour/or torture by the police” (Trans. Gill 124), in fact, the most dangerous thing is:

To be filled with dead silence,  
Lose concern and bear all unconcerned  
To become the slaves of routine,  
Ominous is in fact  
The death of our dreams. (Trans.Gill 124)

Pash does not countenance the view that we should turn ourselves into passive victims- unable to do anything at all about what we have become. Rather than becoming an indifferent and unresponsive subject to the exploitative powers, Pash undertakes to deploy

resistance against the hegemonic and oppressive power structures. While registering his protest, Pash has clearly stated in the poem, "I Refuse" that "I cannot become the bellows of your harmonium" (Trans. Ghai 132). He further says; "Don't hope that I, a son of these fields, /Shall talk of your chewed and spat-out tastes."

Pash's prime motive was to rebel against all kinds of hegemony through the recognition and deconstruction of the existing power discourses. He fought and protested against everything; be it the exploitative and oppressive powers, or the dogmatic religious beliefs, or education and knowledge which instead of liberating us from narrowness and selfishness, actually blind us. In short, Pash's love for true human values makes him assert these values and protest against everything which is inhuman, unkind and unjust.

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## **Social Activism in Ambai's work: A Study**

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### *Abstract*

*C.S Laxmi who writes under the pseudonym Ambai, is a distinguished contemporary south Asian writer from India. She is a champion for the women's cause and through her literary enterprise creates a dialogue for deconstruction and reconstruction of ideologies that determine the woman as 'the other'. She subtly uses language with a distinct narrative style to subvert and deconstruct ideologies and power structures that operate in the society and family spaces. Her creative writing acts as an instrument of assertion, protest, resistance and a medium for restructuring the social order. Her writings are revolutionary in spirit, calling into question accepted ideas and values that operate within the hegemonic power discourses that sustain and naturalize such tendencies. Ambai's works interrogate politics of representation and examine how meanings get socially constructed, produced and historically conditioned. Her short fictions exhibit a strong sense of resistance, protest and activism to revive conventional thoughts. The objective of this article is to critically examine her select works from the point of social activism and situate the writer as a social activist who uses literary media for revolutionary change. The article contests that Ambai's works not just articulate and locate women's issues but trace the root cause of these gendered subjectivity.*

*Keywords: Resistance; activism; protest; deconstruction; representation*

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Postmodern discourses postulate blurring boundaries, hierarchies and negating fixed categories. Postmodern feminist discourses inculcate the features of postmodernism and feminism to constitute a different approach and understanding of underlying issues within its framework. Postmodern feminists seek to analyse notions that bring gender inequality and seek to critique, deconstruct and subvert grand narratives that relegate women to the 'other'. Contemporary writing focuses on how things get misrepresented or do not find place in the main stream narratives, usually the focus being marginalization and victimhood in terms of gender, sexuality, class and caste. The purpose of such literature is to examine the oppressive structures produced and regulated by grand narratives and canonical regimes. Literature serves as a powerful discourse to shackle the canonical order and voice for the suppressed class. In postmodern feminist discourse, gender and sexuality is perceived through a new light. For example, Judith Butler and Lucy Irigaray argue that women's subordinate position is due to socio-cultural construct of gender. Gender, like identity, is represented in a state of fluidity by many postmodern writers. In postmodern feminist thought, gender and sexual identities are looked upon as plural/fluid structures and challenge metanarratives like patriarchy, family and marriage that endorse heterosexuality. In this context, works of



Kamala Das, Mahasweta Devi, Arundhati Roy, Manju Kapur, Bapsi Sidhwa deserve mention as their literary *oeuvre* has fierce voice of resistance and activism against the power monopoly which oppresses people based on caste, class, gender and sexuality. Mahasweta Devi's *Breast Stories*, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Kamala Das's *My Story*, Indira Goswami's *The Moth Eaten Howdah of a Tusker*, and Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Crow Eaters* are testimonials of resistance literature.

Against this backdrop, Ambai's writings emerge as a strong assertive voice to shackle patriarchal and cultural hegemonies that limit women's freedom and expression. Her writings speak for gendered subjectivities within the Indian socio-cultural context. The nature of her works bears postmodern feminist tendencies and echo revolutionary zeal. Through literary analysis, this article seeks to examine Ambai's *oeuvre* as a serious work of protest and resistance. The texts examined for the purpose of study comprise two short fictions namely *A Kitchen in the Corner of the House*, *Forest* and a play *Crossing the River*.

C.S.Laxmi (1944 - ) who writes under her penname Ambai, is a popular south Asian contemporary feminist writer known for her short fiction. She writes in Tamil though most of her writings are available in English. Ambai's powerful and thought provoking writings of protest and social activism aim at shackling the existing hegemonic canons which undermine the human dignity. She carefully chooses to use a rhetoric that allows to examine female sexuality and deconstruct the power-knowledge nexus and by doing so, pose alternative emancipatory ways of consideration. Grand metanarratives like patriarchy, tradition, culture and myths are structures that she seeks to challenge, question and subvert. Patriarchy as a discourse upholds women as symbols for conserving tradition, morality and values. Being a staunch feminist herself, Ambai contests that women are not angels but natural human beings with all emotions, wants and desires. Women either succumb to social structures and internalize them and pass it to the next generation or silently sweep aside innate desires and aspirations to 'fit' themselves into these structures. In this light, Gay Becker's observation is pertinent: "Order begins with the body that is, our understanding of the world and ourselves begins with our reliance on the orderly functioning of our bodies. This bodily knowledge informs what we do and say in our daily life. In addition we carry our histories with us into the present through our bodies" (Becker12). Institutions of power such as patriarchy, marriage, family condition women in order to sustain its power and order in a social framework. The dichotomy and power nexus between the hierarchies/binaries operates within various regulatory structures. In this context, Michael Foucault's statement on power that "it is something that is exercised rather than possessed" (Ann Brooks 50) is pertinent. He contests that such power structures operate in our system and become agencies of control over the body, mind and emotions of human being to sustain power monopoly. Thus, power establishes hierarchies and creates binaries.

French feminists like Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva's critical engagements are closely linked with Derrida's theory of Deconstruction as they forge to expose and deconstruct the patriarchal hegemonic discourse. Ambai's thematic concerns, choice of vocabulary, fragmentary narration and polyphonic voices clearly define the strategy to deconstruct and reconstruct the constructed norms. Following Luce Irigaray's *This Sex Which is not One* (1977) where she states:

That we are women from the start. That we don't have to be turned into women by them, labelled by them, made holy and profaned by them. That that has always already happened without their efforts. And that their history, their stories, constitute the locus of our displacement. It is not that we have a territory of our own; but their fatherland, family, home, discourse, imprison us in enclosed spaces where we cannot keep on moving, living, as ourselves. Their properties our exiles. Their enclosures, the death of our love. Their words, the gag upon our lips. (Irigaray 212)

Historically women's minds are conditioned to act out, following Judith Butler's idea of 'gendered performances.' In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler talks about the construction, repetition and reproduction of the sexual subject which according to her is a temporal process, which operates through the reiteration of norms and the sexual subject is both produced and destabilized in the course of this reiteration. She argues,

Construction is neither a single act nor a causal process initiated by a subject and in a set of fixed effects...As a sedimented effect of a reiterative or ritual practice, sex acquires its naturalized effect, and, yet, it is also by virtue of this reiteration that gaps and fissures are opened up as the constitutive instabilities in such constructions, as that which escapes or exceeds the norm, as that which cannot be wholly defined or fixed by the repetitive labor of that norm. (Butler 10)

The texts selected for this study points Ambai's argument on the hegemonic structures that govern and mobilize gender constructs: one through family structures rooted in traditional beliefs and the other through mythologies that perpetuate social conditioning. Using allusions and mythical characters, Ambai transforms women's silent spaces and articulates the need to revisit old structures and bring in a progressive outlook. The author looks at the silences, gaps and fissures in existing system to understand the dynamics of power politics dictated by dominant discourses. As mentioned, the following texts set for exploration suggests deep rooted structures that subdue and limit women's freedom.

Ambai's short story *A Kitchen in the Corner of the House (AKCH)* is a narrative that revolves around a Rajasthani joint family, rooted in patriarchal and traditional value systems. Papaji, the patriarch of the family upholds authority and control on the household. Women spend most of their time under "a zero watt light bulb hung" and "appeared there like shadows, their heads their deep-coloured skirts melting into the darkness of the room, slapping and kneading the chappati dough or stirring the fragrant, spicy dal" (*AKCH* 41). Money is spent on food, hospitality for guests and other interiors of the house, but the worn out kitchen is a neglected space. Kishan, the youngest son and his wife Minakshi raise their concerns about renovating the kitchen space which is ignored. Spatial metaphor is suggestive of those silent spaces which women negotiate with in daily circumstances. Kitchen also becomes a space for control, authority and power politics among the elder and younger women folk. Within this narrative, Ambai points, "For most women, the home is a site of social relations that are structured by power and inequality" (Eagleton 12) and where "men are the idealized rational, full participants as workers in the public arena of the economy and politics, women were dependents, to be protected and kept close" (Eagleton 12).

The writer directs our attention to the 'controlled and dark spaces' where women spend most of their performing the fixed gender roles through repetitive works. The continual repetition of gender roles is suggested through the repeated act of kneading, frying, peeling and food preparation. Simone de Beauvoir's (1984) statement "one is not born, but

becomes a woman” (267) is resonated in the text through the performances of women within the kitchen space. The repeated acts of gender performance is further explored by Judith Butler in her essay, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist theory” (1988) where she states:

In this sense, gender is no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in timean identity instituted through a stylised repetition of acts. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (Butler 1).

In this story, “The kitchen was not a place; it was essentially a set of beliefs” (*AKCH* 36). Ambai uses repetition in her narratives to enforce how repetition aids to naturalize the performances. Through constant repetitions, a strategy defended by Irigaray and Braidotti, Ambai mimics stereotypical images and by rewriting them she throws into question these representations attaining their deconstruction. If repetition is the language dominant discourse uses to create a “ripple-like pattern” (Sebastian 2000: 101), then, Ambai makes efficient use of it in order to deconstruct the ideologies set by the dominant discourse. She questions patriarchal authority and control and free women “from that dimly lit, narrow-windowed kitchen, there were hands reaching out to control, like the eight tentacles of the octopus that lives in the sea” (*AKCH* 43).

In most of her narratives, Ambai draws references to characters from mythology. Intertextuality is sprinkled across the texts and references to iconic figures like Sita or Draupadi are used to highlight how such images, myths and mythologies aid in the production and dissemination of cultural ethos. Literature too helps in processing this cultural transmission with its vast sources of images and narratives that uphold ideals that are ‘good’ for women. Epics like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* play vital roles in shaping and upholding the ideals set by the patriarchal and cultural regime. Contemporary writers like Ambai, choose to examine these grand narratives critically and rewrite the tales from a feminist standpoint. She observes that mythologies and mythic characters act as agencies to disseminate the codes set by power structures and they become a major cause for subjugation of women. Her book, *Women in Tamil Literature* captures the attention of images and Tamil proverbs that are derogatory and justify the inferior position of women. Culture, tradition and myths do favour conservation of established practices but these norms often relegate women to the ‘other.’ Human minds are conditioned through these narratives. In an article entitled “*Bodies Called Women: Some Thoughts on Gender, Ethnicity and Nation,*” Ambai talks about tradition as a not so stable and fixed notion for it contains within it elements that keep getting erased and reformed. She argues for flexibility and fluidity in notion that blur boundaries that restrict action. Through tradition, women become the torch bearers of cultural identity and patriarchal lineage. According to her, mythological archetypical images like that of Sita provoke women to live in silent spaces within the matrix of unarticulated desires.

The short story *Forest*, has the central character titled Chenthiru who detests having no space and freedom in her family and therefore chooses to craft a life of her own by deciding to stay alone in a forest. This runs parallel to the story of Sita who finds her shelter in the forest when banished by her husband. The retelling juxtaposes the life stories of two

women characters in two different time periods: that of Chenthiru who is a contemporary Sita; the other being *Ramayana's* Sita, who however "rewrites" her story. Ambai's Sita looks at the bygone days of self-sacrifice, control and confinement to the codes dictated by her father or her husband. Chenthiru represents all women and Sita of present context who desire freedom and liberty to frame their own lives. Chenthiru, a middle-aged educated business woman with grown up children, makes an unconventional choice of leaving everything behind—her home, her husband, the city and wants to escape into the tranquillity of the forest. She takes this decision to free herself from the compelled authorities and mechanisms of life. She rewrites the story of Sita and liberates herself in her voyage towards self-discovery. She asks, "It is my life, isn't it? A life that many hands have tossed about, like a ball. Now, let me take hold of it; take it into my hands" (124).

Simone De Beauvoir, Kate Millet and Ronald Barths hold mythology the cause for women's subordination. Myths perpetuate and legitimize that women's responsibility should be directed only towards her family. In Indian mythology, Sita is the ultimate symbol of a perfect Hindu woman who follows her husband unquestionably. Feminist historian, Uma Chakravarti contends that *Ramayana* accentuates female fidelity and chastity and for centuries has been detrimental in shaping woman's roles, responsibilities and identity. Chakravarti argues,

to create a major epic with the emphasis on masculine heroism, valour and honour in the person of Rama and of feminine self-sacrifice, virtue, fidelity and chastity in the person of Sita... [T]he text was a potent instrument for propagating the twin notions that women are the property of men and that sexual fidelity for women was life's major virtue (Chakravarti 71).

In the sphere of drama and theatre too, Ambai has a rebellious voice. To expose misrepresentation of the women's issues on the stage and question the mythical stories of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, is her objective. The ancient Indian epics served as great reservoirs of values, customs, rituals and belief systems. Culture and its myths regulate narratives that hold men superior and women as godly figures meant either to serve or seduce men. Ambai raised objection in representing the traditional images of women as goddesses and archetypes consisting of virtue and morality but rather to bring on to stage real life women with dreams/ aspirations and desire spaces for self-discovery.

Ambai's play *Crossing the River (CR)* or *Aatraik Kadaththal* (in Tamil) originally written in Tamil in the year 2000, is a short one-act play in which there is only one character on stage and that is Sita. The play is in the form of interior monologue with a single character and polyphonic voices at the background which pose various questions. The play presents a metamorphic renaissance in the mindset of the society that lays down stringent codes of morality. It is a bold attempt to redefine womanhood. When the action begins, we see a woman in black standing in front of a river desperately searching for her lost identity and life. The woman is Sita, representing all women and the image of the river at the backdrop suggests the flow of the inner consciousness of her feminine sensibility within the recesses of the mind. The unspoken words, dreams and unfulfilled desires of Sita are spoken by the character on stage. The play interrogates the idea of a woman, as constructed, shaped and imposed by social and cultural forces. Through the metaphor of Sita, who is banished to the forests by Ram, the play embarks upon a series of uncomfortable questions at patriarchy thrown by those polyphonic voices. Sita's anguished monologue expresses:

An authority called Rama  
 An arrogance called Rama  
 An ego called Rama  
 A politics called Rama  
 humiliated me. (CR 434)

The play ends with Sita's determination to face authority and comes with a new strength to face the world. The light falls on her face. She talks of crossing the river 'to see a new world, to assume a new form, to create a new Rajya.'

There is strength left still  
 I shall cross the river  
 I shall cross the river  
 To see the new world  
 To assume a new form  
 To create a new Rajya. (CR 439)

Activism is a kind of high level of awareness of and a burning desire to fight for an issue or an instance of perceived injustice. In the literary world if an author consistently engages with contemporary issues and advocates a certain point of view, the author is considered as activist. Out of one's keen awareness of certain wrongs in the surroundings, when an author intervenes actively to bring about a change in the wide arena of public or national life, the writing inevitably looks like literary activism. Ambai's creative endeavours have serious undertones. The zeal to look back and restructure the notions for betterment of mankind is clearly visible. She uses literature as a platform for resistance to the hegemony, and in consonance with the spirit of Adrienne Rich's essay *When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision* where she talks about "re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction." Rich asserts, "We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us" (18-19). Michel Foucault's remark "not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are; that is, we need to reject our constructed I" (43) fits suitably well while reading Ambai's literary works. What makes Ambai different from other writers is her vehement forceful voice, a zest for shackling the hegemonic power structures in order to deconstruct the regulative discourses that establish canonical order. Her narrative structure and language acts as a counter narrative to fight against established structures that relegate women to the 'other.' Ambai's works are thus revolutionary in spirit and she is undoubtedly an activist in true sense.

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**Amina Wadud and the Islamic Feminist Interpretation of the  
*Qur'an* Chapter 4, Verse 34.**

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*Abstract*

*The contemporary debate about 'the status of women in Islam' revolves around several issues such as veil, polygamy, divorce and some verses of *Qur'an* that have been presumed as gender biased and prescribe subordination of women to men. Verse 34 of Chapter 4 of *Qur'an* (Surat al-Nisa i-e, Women), is central to the *Qur'anic* paradigm on gender relations. This paper examines the classical exegetes' interpretation of this verse influenced by the patriarchy of medieval times that resulted in the development of certain misogynistic concepts that became essential to the Islamic academic discourse. The paper utilizes the feminist hermeneutical methods of Islamic feminist Amina Wadud and others to challenge the traditional male hegemonic meanings of this verse, and reinterpret it in a way that is in conformity with *Qur'an's* egalitarian values, equality of all genders and the belief in God's absolute justice. The paper tries to highlight the way Muslim women produce an alternate way of understanding Islam and their position in Islam, at the same time resisting western stereotypes about Islam and Muslim women by exhibiting their agency.*

*Keywords: *Qur'an*, Islamic Feminism, Hermeneutics, Patriarchy, Gender.*

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Islam has generally been seen as a highly patriarchal religion in the western discourses and it has been presumed that it denies women equal position and equal rights as compared to men in a society. Since Islam derives its rules and regulations from the *Qur'an*, this situation has arisen because most of the classical and post-classical exegetes interpret the *Qur'an* and other sacred Islamic texts in a misogynistic way that establishes the superiority of men over women and denies women the equal position that is enjoyed by men in society. Influenced by a patriarchal set up of the times in which they lived, these exegetes interpreted certain verses of the *Qur'an* in order to establish and legitimise the superiority and domination of men over women. The result is that women have been pushed to a secondary and subordinate position and denied not only equal rights and justice but also excluded from all affairs of life.

With the rise of Islamic feminism, several feminist scholars and activists, taking recourse to a feminist hermeneutics, history, linguistics, sociology and anthropology, revisit the verses of the *Qur'an* with an aim to enunciate the *Qur'anic* principle of equality and justice. They interpret the *Qur'an* in a way that is gender sensitive and debunk the traditionally held notions of male superiority and give rise to a new scholarship that is feminist and at the same time framed within an Islamic paradigm.

Amina Wadud is one such Muslim feminist scholar who firmly believes that the deplorable condition of women in Muslim societies owes its reasons to the deep rooted bias of men towards women and the absence of women in the field of the *Qur'anic* hermeneutics.

Influenced by patriarchy, this bias towards women is perpetuated and legitimized through religion. In the words of Mubarak, “Classical exegetes have been overly influenced by their patriarchal mind-set and historical context, which led them to read patriarchal and misogynist elements into the *Qur’anic* text” (Mubarak, 2004, 274). These classical exegetes read the *Qur’an* in an atomistic way, verse by verse and “the absence of a comprehensive analysis of the *Qur’an* sometimes causes (them) to vindicate the position of women on grounds entirely incongruous with the *Qur’anic* position on woman” (Wadud: 1999, 02).

Pertinently, Islam per se, does not believe in or teach gender inequality. It’s the male centred interpretation of these sacred texts that is to be blamed. The male interpreters have constructed a corpse of *tafsir* (Interpretation) that legitimizes the superiority of men and the subordinate and inferior position of women. Amina Wadud draws attention to the authority of males in traditional *Qur’anic* interpretation, which “were exclusively written by males” and with that “men and men’s experiences were included and women and women’s experiences were either excluded or interpreted through the male vision, perspective, desire, or needs of woman” (Wadud, 1999, 2).

Asma Barlas in her book *Believing Women in Islam*, also affirms that misogyny was ‘assimilated into Islam’ during the first few centuries of Muslim history, ‘by way of the commentaries and super-commentaries on the Qur’an (*tafsir*) and the narratives telling the life and praxis of the Prophet (*ahadith*)’ (Barlas: 2002, 9). She also pitches for differentiating between Islam and the *Shari’a* (Islamic canonical laws). For her Islam is the base, the original, while *Shari’a* is the interpretation of Islam done by certain people in certain cultural and historical contexts:

Since we often do not distinguish between texts, cultures, and histories when studying Islam, we tend to ignore this inversion. As a result, we end up confusing the Qur’an with its Tafsir, and confusing Islam with patriarchy and the practises of repressive Muslim states that have a history of using Islam for their own political ends (Barlas: 2002, 9).

In an effort to debunk such myths, Amina Wadud calls upon women scholars to take up the interpretation of the *Qur’an* and revisit verses of *Qur’an* that have been misinterpreted and create an alternate exegetical scholarship that is gender friendly and at the same time gives women a liberatory ground. Wadud in her famous book “*Qur’an and Women: Reading the Sacred Text from a Woman’s Perspective*’ (1999) acknowledges that the *Qur’an* does not establish the superiority of men over women but articulates the principle of equality and justice between men and women. The *Qur’an* has an egalitarian message and acknowledges mutual respect and responsibility between men and women. In the preface to her book Wadud states that:

Mercifully, the more research I did into the *Qur’an*, unfettered by centuries of historical androcentric reading and Arab-Islamic cultural predilections, the more affirmed I was that in Islam a female person was intended to be primordially, cosmologically, eschatologically, spiritually, and morally a full human being, equal to all who accepted Allah as Lord, Muhammad as prophet, and Islam as *din* (1999: ix–x).

Many thinkers believe that patriarchal societies interpreted and implemented religious teachings and values in accordance with their own way of thinking and by this they have prioritized men and suppressed women all through the history. All this is done by taking the verses of the *Qur’an* out of their context and applying them to all situations in spite of the



fact that these verses were revealed in a specific context at a specific time. It requires a contextual reading to be applied in contemporary situations to understand the true meaning of the *Qur'an* and to make it relevant to any place and time. When the *Qur'an* is understood in the context of its historical background its equalitarian nature is observed. Take for example Chapter 4, *Surat al-Nisa* (Women), Verse 34 of the *Qur'an*. It is a prominent verse of the *Qur'an* that discusses gender relationship. According to Kecia Ali, “the range of ways in which its key provisions have been interpreted illustrates both the presence of androcentrism and/or misogyny in some aspects of the Muslim tradition as well as possibilities for more egalitarian readings of scripture” (Kecia Ali, *The Feminist Sexual Ethics Project*). Within the traditional *Qur'anic* exegesis, most of the interpreters interpret the verse as a straight forward assertion of male superiority. They use this verse to justify that men are the protectors and maintainers of women; therefore women owe their obedience to men in return. Such an interpretation of the *Qur'an* has been a great challenge to Islamic feminists.

الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ  
وَمَا أَنفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ فَاصْذَلِكُمْ قَدِيدَةً حَافِظَاتٌ لِّلْغَيْبِ بِمَا  
حَفِظَ اللَّهُ وَالَّتِي تَخَافُونَ نُشُوزَهُنَّ فَعِظُوهُنَّ وَأَهْجُرُوهُنَّ فِي  
الْمَضَاجِعِ وَأَضْرِبُوهُنَّ فَإِنِ اطَّعْتَكُمْ فَلَا تَبْغُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ سَبِيلًا إِنَّ  
اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا كَبِيرًا ﴿٣٤﴾

(*Al Quran*: Chapter 4, Verse 34)

Abdullah Yousuf Ali translates the verse as:

Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill conduct, admonish them (first), (next), refuse to share their beds, (and last) beat them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them means (of annoyance): for Allah is most high, great (above you all) (*The Qur'an*, 4:34 in Ali).

With a view to deconstruct such traditional interpretations of the *Qur'an*, Islamic feminists counter argue that Islam does not justify gender inequality and discrimination because such an interpretation contradicts the general principle of equality and justice exhibited by the *Qur'an*. In her book *Qur'an and Women*, Wadud argues that some verses of *Qur'an* have been misrepresented and applied out of context or established on the authority of some *Hadith* (the sayings of Prophet PBUH) that are unauthentic and not reliable. She believes that *Qur'an*, in order to make it ‘relevant to any place and time,’ must be contextualized in the light of ‘contemporary context’:

All *Qur'anic* passages, revealed as they were in a specific time in history and within certain general and particular circumstances, were given expression relative to those circumstances. However, the message is not limited to that time or those circumstances historically. A reader must understand the implications of the

*Qur'anic* expressions during the time in which they were expressed in order to determine their proper meaning. That meaning gives the intention of the rulings or principles in the particular verse (Wadud:1999, 04).

While approaching the *Qur'an*, Wadud establishes a 'female inclusive reading' on the *Qur'an* which includes 'women's experiences and perspectives' and to counter the traditional view that women owe their obedience to their men, Wadud also establishes 'the *Qur'anic* principle of *Tawhid*: the unity of Allah' (Wadud: 1999, 26). While examining the verse 4:34 she analyses in detail the syntactical structure of the verse and also links it thematically to other verses of *Qur'an*. Wadud here believes in a "*Qur'anic Weltanschauung*", (Wadud:1999, 25) which is a holistic view of *Qur'an*.

Most exegetes including Al-Tabari, Zamakhsyari, Razi, Ibnu Kasir, Qurtubi and Maududi interpret the above verse to justify the superiority of men over women. By relying on several narratives, Al-Tabari interprets the first part of the verse and explains that men have the right to 'discipline women and manage their affairs'. Tabari reaches this conclusion on the basis of the rationale that men finance women in the form dowry (*mahar*) and property spending during marriage. Al-Razi, another respectable interpreter of the *Qur'an*, also interprets the first part as men having the authority to discipline women and take over their affairs. He goes a step further by stating that "Allah created man as the leader and executor of women's affairs" (al-Razi, 90-91).

Zamakhsyari in his interpretation of the verse reaches a conclusion that the leadership of men over women is a king's command over his people. What he wants to convey is 'men can command and forbid women' (Al-Kasysyaf, 67).

Qurtubi, an influential interpreter of *Qur'an*, analyses the word '*qawwam*' semantically. He argues that the Arabic word *qawwam* is derived from the word '*qiyam*' which means 'to conduct something', 'having authority to manage and guard'. Therefore, in the light of this men must manage women's affairs, discipline them, guard them and forbid their appearance in public. At the same time, 'women must obey their husbands and fulfil their demands as long as it is not wrongdoing' (Al- Qurtubi, 280).

Ibnu Kasir in his interpretation of the verse states that men are the 'leaders, commanders and educators of women'. That is the reason all prophets and great kings have been from men. Ibnu Kasir supports this argument by referring to a *Hadith* where it is narrated that the ascendance to throne of a daughter of a Persian king would result in the collapse of the kingdom (Ibnu Kasir, 20).

The traditional exegetes interpret the later part of the verse in the light of the first part. Regarding the phrase *qanitat* described as 'pious women', Tabari interprets it as 'obedience of women to Allah and their husbands'. However, later exegetes like Qurtubi, Zamakhsyari and Ibnu Kasir interpret the word *qanitat* as 'obedience of women only to their husbands'. Because men are the leaders of the family, protectors and maintainers of women's lives, and because they spend on women and children from their property, women are obliged to obey them. This obedience is demanded not only in the husband's presence but also in his absence. Therefore, in the absence of husbands women must protect their chastity and modesty, keep themselves from adultery (*zina*) and keep the house and husband's property. If women fail to do so, men have the right to reprimand them and even beat them.

Asma Barlas rejects this interpretation of *Qur'an* that defines “husbands as guardians over their wives and as wife beaters” (Barlas, 2002: 184) and says that despite the egalitarian teachings of the *Qur'an* on marriage and other affairs of life, most exegetes have misinterpreted the *Qur'an* and given men undue preference.

Kecia Ali also believes that *Qur'an* has ‘a basic stance’ that all Muslim women are Muslims first and in no way inferior to men but their ‘religious equals’. She quotes several verses from the *Qur'an* to establish her point that men and women are equal and the relationship between the two is mutual and complementary. With regard to verse 34, she writes that “it is the clearest *Qur'anic* example of hierarchy between men and women. It presents numerous difficulties for translation, since so many of the words have contested meanings” (Kecia Ali, The Feminist Sexual Ethics Project).

According to Amina Wadud, the *Qur'an* is egalitarian and does not establish inherent values given to men or women. All human beings are equal before God and *Qur'an* acknowledges the equal potential of both men and women. It is unjustified to assume that verse 4:34 establishes the superiority of men over women and gives them absolute authority to manage women’s affairs by any means. Wadud argues that this verse is taken out of context and interpreted to benefit men. Otherwise, this verse establishes the functional relationship between men and women in a society. In this connection Mubarak argues that “we must read *Qur'an* 4:34 in the light of the principles expressed throughout the *Qur'an*, more specifically, within the “paradigm of gender relations established by the *Qur'an*” (Mubarak, 2004:274). So far as the second part of the verse is concerned, *Qur'an* does not command a wife to obey her husband absolutely. Wadud believes that if looked at from a proper perspective, this verse actually deals with a marital disorder and provides possible solutions in a hierarchical order. In order to find a more egalitarian and gender sensitive meaning of this verse, Wadud rephrases it by giving the problematic words in their original form:

Men are [qawwamuna ‘ala] women, [on the basis] of what Allah has [preferred] (faddala) some of them over others, and [on the basis] of what they spend of their property (for the support of women). So good women are [qanitat], guarding in secret that which Allah has guarded. As for those from whom you fear [nushuz], admonish them, banish them to beds apart, and scourge them. Then, if they obey you, seek not a way against them (Wadud:1999, 70).

Wadud analyses the verse by first establishing the use of the Arabic word *bi* which means ‘on the basis of’. It implies that within a sentence, the characteristics and contents stated before *bi* are determined ‘on the basis of’ what comes after *bi*. Therefore, men are *qawwamun* only in two conditions- first is the “preference” ‘*faddala*’ and the second is “that they support women from their means. If either condition fails, then the man is not *qawwam* over that woman” (Wadud: 1999, 70). As for the word *faddala* which points towards a preference made by God, commentators have not reached a consensus over the value of the referred preference. For Wadud, it’s not possible to make a generalized statement on the basis of this word since this preference is restricted to material preference (inheritance):

With regard to material preference, there is only one *Qur'anic* reference which specifies that Allah has determined for men a portion greater than for women: inheritance. The share for a male is twice that for the female (Wadud: 1999, 70).

This preference is also restricted to some men only and not all.

It reads '*ba'd* (some) of them over *ba'd* (others)... All men do not excel over all women in all manners. Some men excel over some women in some manners. Likewise, some women excel over some men in some manners. So, whatever Allah has preferred, it is still not absolute (Wadud: 1999, 71).

Wadud argues that men as *qawwamun* is a responsibility rather than an award. *Qur'an* establishes men's responsibility as *qawwamun* so that women are not burdened with additional responsibilities apart from childbearing and childrearing. So, this is done "for simple balance and justice in creation, and to avoid oppression". This is done so that "woman is not burdened with additional responsibilities which jeopardize that primary demanding responsibility that only she can fulfil" (Wadud:1999, 73). In the words of Wadud, "this verse establishes an ideal obligation for men with regard to women to create a balanced and shared society. This responsibility is neither biological nor inherent, but it is valuable" (Wadud: 1999, 73).

The interpretation of the second part of the verse is more problematic for women than the first one, since it apparently gives the husband the authority to beat the wife when she disobeys him. According to Wadud, the words that need to be reinterpreted here are *qanitat*, *nushuz* and *daraba*. Wadud says that the Arabic word *qanitat* is wrongly interpreted as 'obedient' or 'obedient to husband'. It actually means 'good' women. If looked at in the context of whole *Qur'an*, *qanitat* has been used for both males and females and "describes a characteristic or personality trait of believers towards Allah" (wadud:1999, 74).

Again, it doesn't seem plausible that *Qur'an* reduces 'being a good women' to 'being obedient to husband'. Not only this, the traditional exegetes falsely interpret *nushuz* as disobedience to husband. It implies that a good woman should be obedient to husband and if she fails to be so the husband has a right to beat her. For Wadud, *nushuz* does not mean disobedience to husband as *Qur'an* uses it for both men and women. It rather means a state of discord and disharmony between married couples for which *Qur'an* gives some possible solutions. The first step towards a resolution of this discord is 'dialogue and mutual agreement' and if it does not work the second step proposed is a 'separation of beds'. As a last measure *Qur'an* proposes 'scourge' (Wadud: 1999, 75). So for as the word *daraba* is concerned, Wadud and other feminist scholars reject its interpretation as beating or causing physical damage. Wadud says that it can mean 'to strike out' but at the same time it means 'to set an example':

According to *Lisan al-'Arab* and *Lanes's Lexicon*, *daraba* does not necessarily indicate force or violence. It is used in the *Qur'an*, for example, in the phrase '*daraba Allah mathalan . . .*' ('Allah gives or sets as an example. . .'). It is also used when someone leaves, or 'strikes out' on a journey (Wadud:1999, 76).

However, it cannot mean to strike repeatedly and intensely because the *Qur'an* does not believe in violence towards women and this verse actually does not act as a licence for men to beat their wives as was prevalent before the Prophet's time. It acts as a restriction as *Qur'an* has made *daraba* the last resort not the first or second. In the wake of female infanticide and violence against women prevalent in Arab before the Prophet "this verse should be taken as prohibiting unchecked violence against females" and a severe restriction of existing practices" (Wadud:1999, 76).

Despite the egalitarian teachings of Islam most exegetes have shown a tendency to interpret the *Qur'an* in a way that gives undue advantage to men over women. Riffat Hassan

complains that such a situation arises because women hardly bother to participate in the investigation of primary Islamic sources of the *Qur'an* and *Ahadith*. In her article 'Feminism in Islam' she writes that:

...these sources have been interpreted only by Muslim men who have arrogated themselves the task of defining the ontological, theological, sociological, and eschatological status of Muslim women. While it is encouraging to know that women such as Khadija and A'isha (wives of the Prophet Muhammad) and Rabi'a al-Basri (the outstanding woman Sufi) figure significantly in early Islam, the fact remains that until the present time, the Islamic tradition and Muslim culture remain overwhelmingly patriarchal (Sharma & Young, 1999: 250).

Wadud believes that the lack of women's participation has resulted in misogynist interpretations of the *Qur'an* that encourage stereotypes about women and men. Therefore, she bats for women's participation in creating basic paradigms through which *Qur'an* and *Qur'anic* interpretations are examined and discussed. Otherwise, while justifying 'the restrictions placed on the women's right to pursue personal happiness within the context of Islam,' these interpretations pose the greatest danger when they are attributed to 'the *Qur'an* itself rather than to the authors who wrote them' (Wadud:1999, 35).

In the light of the above discussion it can well be concluded that more awareness of the importance of liberatory and non-repressive reading of the *Qur'an* and particularly verse 4:34 will lead to construction of a corpus of gender sensitive scholarship that will empower women and also result in less domestic abuse justified in the name of Islam, as well as less social and cultural stigma around domestic abuse in Muslim communities. In the light of the changing situations and a changing understanding of gender equality, certain reforms have to be introduced in order to bring a positive change in Muslim societies without violating the fundamentals and true Islamic beliefs and values. The gender sensitive re-reading of the *Qur'an* not only provides these women a liberatory ground, but also challenges and dispels the gender stereotypes about women and Islam in the western world which sees Islam as 'oppressive' and women as 'victims' who need to be 'saved and liberated'. By coming up with an alternate reading of the *Qur'an* and other religious texts, Muslim women express a feminine sensibility and exhibit their agency and identity in a positive way within the framework of Islam.

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**Of Land and the Anthropocene: A Postcolonial Ecocritical Approach  
to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun***

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*Abstract*

*The Anthropocene Epoch is considered by many as having the same evolutionary impact as the geological ages such as the Ecocene and the Pleistocene. This period is nothing short of an ecocide. As a group of complex organisms, we are mindlessly exploiting the resources of the planet. Our general disregard for the health of Earth has brought us to the point where we are faced with an ecological crisis. This glooming reality of an impending ecocatastrophe, largely caused by human agency has made many philosophers, writers and scientists all over the world revisit and reorient their philosophies, ideologies and theories. It is in this context that a re-reading of postcolonial texts has been initiated so that a better understanding of the relationship between land and the Anthropocene can be evaluated in the midst of forced capitalistic and anthropocentric ideologies. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* are postcolonial texts that delineate the developmental model of the west being copied and pasted in the since-termed developing countries. Located in the dusty lands of Nigeria, these texts question the validity of these models while posing questions on their adverse effects on the land and on the relationship between the land and the indigenous people. While referring to varied herbs, flora and fauna, the writer uses these texts to foreground the rich natural diversity of these places. However, in the name of civilization and development these natural habitats are being disturbed and the local knowledge being snubbed.*

*Keywords: anthropocene, ecocene, Pleistocene, earth, ecocriticism, postcolonial, environment*

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In contemporary times, the relationship between man and nature has been much affected by the greed and insatiability of mankind. We have now entered the Anthropocene Epoch where the resources are scarce and the demands copious. The Anthropocene Epoch is considered by many as having the same evolutionary impact as the geological ages such as the Ecocene and the Pleistocene. This period is nothing short of an ecocide. As a group of complex organisms, we are mindlessly exploiting the resources of the planet. Our general disregard for the health of Earth has brought us to the point where we are faced with an ecological crisis. Presently, the level of Carbon Dioxide is at the highest, the last four white rhinos were killed by poachers in 2008, while 12 percent of bird species and 25 percent of mammal species are likely to disappear in the next 30 years, and 11 billion people are expected to infringe upon the natural resources by 2150 (*Ecological Ethics* 17).This

glooming reality of an impending ecocatastrophe, largely caused by human agency has made many philosophers, writers and scientists all over the world revisit and reorient their philosophies, ideologies and theories.

Scott Slovic in his essay, “The Third Wave of Ecocriticism: North American Reflections in the Current Phase of the Discipline” (2010) elucidates the three waves of Ecocriticism as first mentioned by Lawrence Buell. While the first wave concentrated on writings about nature, wilderness and other familiar aspects of environmental literature, the second wave ecocritics including Laurence Coupe (*The Green Studies Reader* 2000), Kathleen Wallace (*Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism* 2001) and Joni Adamson et al (*The Environmental Justice Reader* 2002) have focused their lenses on urban and suburban experience and environmental justice. The third wave of Ecocriticism that started emerging in 2000, but was not labelled until 2009, calls for ‘eco-cosmopolitanism’, ‘the global soul’ and ‘translocality’. As Scott Slovic puts: “it questions about the possibility of post-national and post-ethnic visions of the human experience of the environment... It recognizes ethnic and national peculiarities and yet transcends ethnic and national boundaries; this third wave explores all facets of human experience from an environmental viewpoint”. (6-7)

It is in this context that a re-reading of postcolonial texts has been initiated so that a better understanding of the relationship between land and the Anthropocene can be evaluated in the midst of forced capitalistic and anthropocentric ideologies. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* are postcolonial texts that delineate the developmental model of the west being copied and pasted in the since-termed developing countries. Located in the dusty lands of Nigeria, these texts question the validity of these models while posing questions on their adverse effects on the land and on the relationship between the land and the indigenous people. While referring to varied herbs, flora and fauna, the writer uses these texts to foreground the rich natural diversity of these places. However, in the name of civilization and development these natural habitats are being disturbed and the local knowledge being snubbed. This post-development, as Kriemilds opines, confronts “the fundamental contradiction of global capitalism and economic growth with the goals of equity, empowerment and a sustainable environment” (*Feminist Post-Development Thought* 17). However for the post-colonial thinkers, Wolfgang Sachs and Arturo Escobar:

The epistemological and political reconciliation of economy and ecology proposed by the sustainable development is intended to create the impression that only minor adjustments to the market system are needed to launch an era of economically sound development, hiding the fact that the economic framework itself cannot hope to accommodate environmental considerations without substantial reforms. (197)

*Purple Hibiscus* (2003) is Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s debut novel foregrounding two Igbo families: Papa Eugene’s family, situated in Nnugu, consists of his wife Beatrice Achike, commonly referred to as Mama, a 15 year-old daughter Kambili, a son Chukwuka, always referred to as Jaja and Himself. Papa Eugene is a wealthy businessman, owning several businesses along with the Sunday Standard newspaper- the only paper that dares to give a critical voice towards the corrupt and oppressive military government of Nigeria. The second family is Auntie Ifeoma’s family, consisting of two sons, namely; Obiora and Chima, one daughter Amaka and their widowed mother. Auntie Ifeoma is a lecturer at the University of Nigeria in Nsukka. Papa Eugene and Auntie Ifeoma, both Roman Catholic, are children of



Papa Nnukwu who did not convert to Christianity, but remains a practicing believer in the indigenous ways of belief and worship.

In the narrative, the novelist uses the thread of Religion to highlight colonized hybrid minds and their constant discord with the decolonizing hybrid minds. Though Papa Eugene is an extravagant giver to the church, the poor, schools and his own immediate family, his giving is always tied with the need to assert power over everything and everyone indigenous whom he regards as pagan. He refuses to sing Igbo hymns in church; he does he appreciate a sermon in his own language, and “did not like to make his confession in Igbo” (104). Whenever he resorts to speaking Igbo it is to call attention to something bad. In an instance, when he finds Mama and Jaja allowing Kambili to eat a bowl of cereal 10 minutes before the Eucharist, instead of observing the imposed fast, he asks them in Igbo, “Has the devil asked you all to go on errands for him?... Has the devil built a tent in my house?” (102 & 69, 97, 77). He associated English language with civilization and English religion with supremacy. Hence at the village the reader is informed that, “Papa liked it when the villagers made an effort to speak English around him. He said it showed good sense” (60). Papa also “Changed his accent when he spoke, sounding British, when he was with the white religious groups such as Father Benedict and Sister Margaret” (46). Papa Eugene’s preference for English language might be the reason that, unlike the rest of his family he denounces use his native Igbo name and baptizes himself and his wife as Eugene and Beatrice. Indeed, it wouldn’t be an exaggeration to state that maybe he even considered his God to be also white.

However, Eugene meets his greatest resistance from his father, Papa Nnukwu, and his sister, Auntie Ifeoma. Papa Nnukwu, a traditionalist, holding on to the indigenous beliefs and rituals of the Igbo people, just like his daughter Auntie Ifeoma, lives in a shack, wears faded clothes, eats food without meat and is sickly, but will not surrender to his rich son’s use of material power to coerce him to Christian conversion. Although Auntie Ifeoma is a widow with four kids, her intellectual class allows her to resist her brother’s version of Catholicism. Kambili, a 15-year-old daughter of Papa Eugene is the narrator of their stories. The characters in Adichie’s narratives identify themselves with the locales of their native places. They are, however also caught in the dilemma to accept their innate knowledge or to adopt the ways of the west in the hope of being termed ‘civilized’. In fact, in *Purple Hibiscus*, Kambili’s narrations reveal the dire need of his father to maintain ‘sameness’, a perfect order that allowed him to control the wildness of his family:

I wondered when Papa would draw up a schedule for the baby, my new brother, if he would wait until he was a toddler. Papa liked order. It showed even in the schedules themselves, the way his meticulously drawn lines, in black ink, cut across each day, separating study from siesta, siesta from family time, family time from prayer, prayer from sleep. He revised them often. When we were in school, we had less siesta time and more study time, even on weekends. (23-24)

Adichie uses this extract to highlight the need for the western thought as embodied by Eugene to ascertain an order or structure to the wilderness so as to ascertain its reign over it. Eugene’s orderly structure beings to disintegrate and “things begin to fall apart at home” (3) when Jaja begins to question Papa Eugene’s beliefs in the midst of his acts of violence. Kambili links his voice of freedom with “Aunty Ifeoma’s experimental purple hibiscus; fragrant with the undertones of freedom, a different kind of freedom... A freedom to be, to do” (16). Just as these wild flowers were an experiment freeing itself from the tenets of

colonialism and the hangover of postcolonialism, Jaja's voice carried an undertone of freedom no one had earlier imagined. The novel makes no secret about it as the narrator tells us "Nssuka started it all; Auntie Ifeoma's little garden next to the verandah of her flat in Nssuka began to lift the silence" (16).

For Kambili, many environmental elements symbolize her growth as a character. The fruits and flower trees in her yard are signifier of richness while they represent loss after a storm. After her mother miscarries, she feels disgusted by the rotting fruit tree. The rot stands for the illness and sickness in their household. Her confinement in the home is identical to the confinement of the tall trees behind the wall. As Kambili goes to change, she looks at the trees outside:

I sat at my bedroom window and changed; the cashew tree was so close I could reach out and pluck a leaf if it were for the silver-coloured crisscross of mosquito netting. The bell-shaped yellow fruits hung hazily, drawing buzzing bees that bumped against my window's netting [...]. It was the early rainy season and the frangipani trees planted next to the walls already filled the yard with the sickly-sweet scent of their flowers. A row of purple bougainvillea, cut smooth and straight as a buffet table, separated the gnarled trees from the driveway. Closer to the house, vibrant bushes of hibiscus reached out and touched one another as if they were exchanging their petals. The purple plants had started to push out sleepy buds but most of the flowers were still on the red ones. They seem to bloom so fast, those red hibiscuses, considering how often Mama cut them to decorate the church altar and how often visitors plucked them as they walked past to their parked cars. (8-9).

Nature becomes a source of direction, joy, happiness and peace for Kambili.

The red hibiscus represents the anger and the feistiness Kambili felt at her life. The casualness with which the passer-by plucked the flowers represents the casualness towards nature that we experience in our daily life. As Greg Garrad, a noted ecocritic avers, "The metaphysical argument for biocentricism is meant to sustain moral claims about the intrinsic value of the natural world which will in turn affect our attitudes and behaviour towards nature" (202).

Similar to the young Kambili in *Purple Hibiscus*, Ugwu in *Half of a Yellow Sun* acts also acts as a narrator in the novel. While, unraveling the events in the novel, he also acts as a touchstone on which the progressive ideals of his Master Odenigbo are tested and preached to the world. His 'telling' of the story has another agenda the 'telling' of a grand historical narrative that questions the pre-ordained history:

There are two answers to the things they will teach you about our land: the real answer and the answer you give to the school to pass. You must read books and learn both answers. I will give you books, excellent books". Master stopped to serve his tea. "They will teach you that a white man called Mungo Park discovered river Niger. That is rubbish. Our people fished in the Niger long before Mungo Park's grandfather was born. But in your exam, write that it is Mungo Park.' Yes sah. Ugwu wished that this person called Mungo Park had not offended Master so much (11).

This re-telling of the history is the re-telling of the relationship between the land and the anthropocene. Ugwu by his 'telling' connects stories, ideas and people - an appropriate ecological orientation. Odenigbo describes this relationship while explaining the reaction of

his indigenous mother to his modern university fiancé Olanna. He asserts, “The real tragedy of the postcolonial world is that the majority of people had no say in whether or not they wanted this new world; rather, it is that the majority have not been given the tools to negotiate this new world.” (111)

*Half of a Yellow Sun* sheds light on post independence ethnic strife in Nigeria, which is also the historical precedent of *Purple Hibiscus*. As Olu Oguibe asserts, “The crisis of the Nigerian state reflected long-standing geographical, religious, and ethnic divisions [often promoted by the British during the colonial era] between the predominantly Muslim North and the largely Christian South, as well as between feudal Yoruba in the West and republican Igbo in the East” (88). The novel focuses on the lives of Igbo twins, Olanna and Kainene, who have grown up in Lagos where they received an elite private school education before attending college in England. Their father, Chief Ozobia, “owns half of Lagos” (*HYS* 59), but, like his wife, has no formal education. The novel commences with Olanna planning to move to Nsukka to join her Igbo fiance, Odenigbo, a lecturer at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Richard Churchill, an English man who falls in love with Kainene, describes her as “almost androgynous” and with “boyish hips” (60). Kainene plays the role of the son in the family, expanding the family business in Port Harcourt, brokering military contracts during the Biafra War, and running an Igbo refugee camp. Chief Ozobia and his wife flee Nigeria during the war and seek refuge in England while Kainene and Olanna stay and witness the horror and chaos that ensue. The novel closes at the end of the war when their parents return to find Olanna alive, but Kainene missing and her fate unknown.

In the course of the novel, Ugwu becomes a soldier and rapes a young woman. He sickens himself after raping the girl and the memory of “those” soldiers raping girls at the Barracks that sickened him, lingers on his breath (365, 399). Ugwu, by raping the girl, became what he never thought he would be; violent and strange to himself. He becomes the monster that he always thought existed over yonder. Adichie uses this reference to reiterate the point that when we lose our innate knowledge and try to emulate a projected self, our real monsters surface. The oppression faced by Ugwu and the other characters in the war represent the aggression faced by Mother Earth at the hands of the Anthropocene. “For the book cover, though, he [Ugwu] draws a map of Nigeria and traces in the Y shape of the rivers Niger and Venue in Bright red. He uses the same shade of red to circle the boundaries where, in the south east, Biafra existed for three years” (82). Franz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*, finds the root of this: “The Algerian’s criminality, his impulsivity and the violence of his murders are therefore not the consequence of the organisation of his nervous system nor of a particular trait in his character, but the direct product of the colonial situation (250).

The narrative adds another perspective to the ecological story with the characterization of Richard Churchill, a journalist who hopes to write back home about hidden African treasures and customs. It makes a brilliant point on the consumption of African culture and of Africans by Europeans. The male expatriates in Richard’s company speak of land and property acquisition, as well as setting up businesses in Nigeria. Richard, not completely on the other hand, wants to know the culture of the Igbo and write about Nigeria and its people. The methods of acquisition are different, but in principle it is the same kind of imperialism. Richard, in the surreptitious manner that writing allows, is enabled a slower, gradual, beneath-the-surface kind of imperialism. For Richard the place

represents a mysticism, a romanticism, for the rest of the English it is a market place. But for none, it is a land with a belonging.

Adichie's narratives *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* encourage a deep introspection and consultation with the self, thinking towards how the self-appropriates itself with the land. These novels are not explicitly 'environmental', but touch the nerve of postcolonial ecological reading. The land can only be sustainably addressed if the relationship between land and the anthropocene is re-read and refurbished sustainably because ecology is an interaction with life not a study of life. In this context, Teresa Brennan remarks, "To say that we need to go back, slow down will be portrayed as antiprogress. But progress lies in straining human imagination to its limits of cleaning up the mess-while retaining the information that mess has yielded" (*Ecological Ethics* xiv).

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## **New Woman in Africa: A Reading of Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra***

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### *Abstract*

*Florence Onyebuchi Emecheta, born into a humble Igbo family in Lagos has lived a hard life mainly because of her gender, race, and class. She suffers gender discrimination from childhood, becomes an orphan at a young age, mother at the age of 17, abandoned by her husband at 22. As a single young woman from Africa with five children she finds herself on the margins of British society. Her sole comfort lay in her love for writing. Her books, In the Ditch (1972), Second Class Citizen (1974), The Bride Price (1976), The Slave Girl (1977), The Joys of Motherhood (1979) cover themes such as the marginalization of women and girls, patriarchal oppression, racism, poverty, and social exclusion. The present paper is a study of Destination Biafra (1994), Emecheta's novel that departs from her usual concern with illiterate or marginally located protagonists who function within a limited social context. Through Debbie Ogedemgbe, the protagonist of the novel, Emecheta puts forward a new type of woman. The rural, submissive, timid, withdrawn woman is replaced by an individualistic, assertive, die-hard fighter for a cause. Debbie represents the emerging New Woman in African society.*

*Keywords: Patriarchal oppression, racism, marginalization, discrimination, gender roles, and New Woman.*

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### **Introduction**

The concept of the New Woman has been taking diverse forms in the cultural history of the West. In ancient Greece, Euripides presented women like Phaedra, Medea, and Helen in his place who defied the norms and expectations of their respective societies from women. During the Renaissance, William Shakespeare's comedies represented women like Viola, Rosalind Beatrice, and others who dominated over their male counterparts and faced challenges in a way not associated with women and their social roles in general. Ibsen and G.B. Shaw also represented women from a different perspective. Nora Helmer in *A Doll's House* (1974) and Ann Whitefield in *Man and Superman* (1946) have been called New Women. The concept of New Woman though changing over time has always been of one who seeks roles that are radically different from those assigned by a particular society. It is noteworthy that such women have emerged during periods of stress and crisis. Similarly, Emecheta has brought out the concept of New woman in *Destination Biafra* (1994), a

“historical fiction” (Emicheta 1994, ix) with a background of the Biafran War, also known as The Nigerian Civil War.

### **Nigerian Civil War Literature**

Chidi Amuta, the foremost critic of Nigerian Civil War literature, states, “[O]ne of its most enduring and significant legacies is the numerous literary works it has generated and inspired” (1983: 83). The civil war constitutes the most important theme in Nigerian literature, such as Chukwuemeka Ike's *Sunset at Dawn*; Okechukwu Mezu's *Behind the Rising Sun* (1971); Wole Soyinka's *Madmen and Specialists* (1971), and *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (1972); and Festus Iyayi's *Violence* (1979) testify to a still lingering war consciousness. (Amuta: 1983). The war had always been considered man's domain, so is the War literature. The representation of women in this literature is also marginal. Oluwatoyin O. Oluwaniyi (2019) in the essay, “Women's Roles and Positions in African Wars” argues that African women throughout history have been engaged at the logistical, ideological, and combatant levels as fighters, carriers, and spies at the same time, as wives, mothers, and sex slaves. But the marginalization and erasure of women's unique roles and positions result in their absence in the national narratives. Later many women writers also contributed to war literature but as Umeh contends, “African women writers have not been treated as major contributors to the general output of war literature ...this trend point of the dominant male tradition in Nigerian letters and the phallic criticism which continue to repudiate the validity and complexity of the female” (1987:194).

In *Women and War: A Study of the Novels of Buchi Emecheta, Cyprian Ekwensi, and Elechi Amadi*, Chandrani Biswas, an Indian scholar examines some Nigerian works about the war in Biafra in the larger context of gender. *Survive the Peace* by Ekwensi and *Estrangement* by Amdi show women as Victims, fighters, and survivors. Ekwensi recreates the post-war situation and the double standards of people in Nigerian society. James Odugo, the male protagonist, while searching for his missing family, develops relationships with three other women. He refuses to accept his wife, who had also meanwhile developed a relationship with a soldier. Francis Imbuga's play, *The Married Bachelor* also depicts such double standards of society, which made women question accepted values that why should the success of a women's life be reckoned strictly in terms of marriage?" African literature also portrays stereotypes of women: the mother figure, the sensual and passionate lover, the rural woman, the sophisticated city girl. Chinua Achebe's *Girls at War* is a tragic love story during the Civil War of Nigeria. Hence, War literature diminishes women's participation in the war, and when they are depicted, the focus is on women's support to fighting men and suffering people rather than on their combatant roles.

### **The Concept of New Woman in *Destination Biafra***

The novel is Emecheta's distinct writing that explores political and national concerns and is a unique account of woman's involvement in the war. Though the traditional myths consider females as biologically less capable of heavy work, yet the women of Africa not only did the most laborious activities in agriculture but also became great warriors. Like European and American women, who played a daring role in the first and second World

Wars, the African women also contributed considerably to several movements like the Mau Mau freedom movement, the Namibian liberation movement, the antiapartheid demonstrations in South Africa, the Biafran War, also known as The Nigerian Civil War, and others. War inevitably gives rise to war literature. *Destination Biafra*, as the title suggests, belongs to the body of literature generated by the Nigerian Civil War. In the main narrative, Emecheta tries to compare her version of war to that of her male predecessors. *Destination Biafra*, we learn, is the title Debbie Ogedemgbe gives to the book she is writing about her own experience during the war (246).

Though Emecheta's heroines protest vehemently against their enslaved condition, it is only Debbie in *Destination Biafra*, who achieves her sought-after target for wholeness. Emecheta's African 'New Woman' follows her inner dictates for the betterment of her society and nation. The author shows that the African 'New Woman' shuns easy wealth and ostentatious living, preferring rather demonstrate her significance through more concrete and nationalist goals. In *Destination Biafra*, the author departs from her usual concern with illiterate or marginally located protagonists who function within a limited social context. Debbie Ogedemgbe, the protagonist of the novel, rejects the easy submissive role her parents expect her to play concerning the choice of a marital partner for her. In an essentially patriarchal society, her total liberation and independence of mind represent the author's vision of the New Woman, who has finally shed the burden of conformity and obedience to old-fashioned social values.

Emecheta first introduces her 'New Woman' Debbie in a small hotel in Ikeja, on the outskirts of Lagos, with Alan Grey. They spend the night together. Although the African culture lays so much emphasis on the virginity of a girl and that sex before marriage is taboo; Debbie throws caution to the wind and indulges in a physical relationship with Alan Grey without any commitment to marriage:

She was such an independent soul who did not look forward to being tied down yet. . . Well, who could blame her? With her father's millions in Nigeria and Switzerland, why should she, until it became absolutely necessary? (36)

Debbie also breaks the familiar stereotypes in African literature, the figure of the 'sweet mother,' the passive all accepting figure of fecundity and self-sacrifice, and the figure of the woman as a passionate and sensual lover. All these stereotypes limit the woman's potential in society by confining her to certain accepted social roles of the 'mother', wife', 'mistress', and 'beloved'. Emecheta seems to subvert the stereotypes of women with her heroine, Debbie, who is presented as an individual in her own right, who knows her mind and is far ahead of Emecheta's other protagonists. Alan Grey describes her as "slim and pretty, but arrogant. She was intelligent, nice to be with, but independent. She was too English for his liking" (36). Both Alan and Debbie share this physical proximity, much aware of the fact that they will not tie themselves in the knot of matrimony.

The other heroines of Emecheta seek to balance their roles, as wives or mothers with their personal aspirations, but Debbie asserts against all kinds of rigid, patriarchal attitudes, which intend to circumscribe her in socially approved roles. Marriage and motherhood are not her goals in life. At Chijioke Abosi's marriage reception, she doesn't approve of the idea of being exhibited as an educated, accomplished girl:

If her parents thought they could advertise her like a fatted cow, they had another thing coming. She would never agree to a marriage like theirs, in which the two

partners were never equal [...] It was just that she did not wish to live a version of their life — to marry a wealthy Nigerian, ride the most expensive cars in the world, be attended by servants. . . No, she did not want that; her ideas of independence in marriage had no place in that set-up. She wanted to do something more than child breeding and rearing and being a good passive wife to a man whose ego she must boost all her days while making sure to submerge every impulse that made her a full human. Before long she would have no image at all, she would be as colorless as her poor mother. Surely, every person should have the right to live as he or she wished, however, different that life might seem to another? (44)

At the beginning of the novel, Emecheta implies explicitly that Debbie is not hesitant in defying the conventions of her culture. She, unlike a traditional African woman, wants to do much more than being a passive, docile, subservient wife. She goes beyond the dictates of society in pursuit of what she thinks to be an appropriate action. She refuses to follow the traditional like of domesticity, like her mother. Debbie is a representative of the African New Woman, who along with her friend Teteku joins the army in defiance of her mother's protest. She represents a breed of economically independent urban women as Maria Rosa Cutrufelli discusses in *Women in Africa: The Roots of Oppression*,

The new characteristically urban figure of the male-unprotected, husbandless, single woman has significantly taken shape; and in the light of the traditional view of celibacy as a social failure, even a crime against society, the consciously deliberate rejection of marriage on the part of an increasing number of urban women appears to be courageous, indeed a daring deed (Cutrufelli 1983, 3)

Debbie's shapeless green uniform obliterates her erstwhile feminine qualities of grace and elegance, her actions show a determination to carry out her stated intentions. She realizes the power of the uniform when she shouts at the twenty-five officers relaxing at the Ikeja barracks mess, "[E]veryone stands up and put your hands on your head. Any false move means death. Shoot to kill any soldier who moves. You there take all their guns and ammunition. You, search them! Unarm the soldiers, unsoldier them all" (75). The soldiers listen to her command, but the look on their faces betray their disgust, "Whatever you do, however, much you are armed and in command now, you are still a woman" (75). Debbie is constantly reminded by her mother and her surroundings that she is a woman. Her mother, a traditional African woman, is unable to understand her daughter's choice of profession and reinforces the patriarchal values of African society, and admonishes her. Emecheta in an article entitled, "Feminism with small 'f'" (1988) explicates the patriarchal setup:

In most African societies the birth of a son enhances a woman's authority in the family. Male children are very, very important. Yet, this girl-child that was desired originally comes into her own at a very early age. From childhood, she is conditioned into thinking that being a girl she must do all housework, she must help her mother to cook, clean, fetch water and look after her younger brothers and sisters. If she moans or shows signs of not wanting to do any of this, she will be sharply reminded by her mother; 'But you are a girl! Going to be a woman!'

Debbie as a 'New Woman' goes beyond the dictates of society and chooses a white man as her lover. Debbie reflects Emecheta's concept of freedom in every sphere for a woman. She is a sexually liberated woman in African society, the society that brands her as a white man's whore. Salihu Lawal calls her, "To the Bature you are just a whore, to be used



and discarded, just as they are doing to our country” (120). Stella Ogedemgbe, like a typical mother, advises Debbie not to travel but Debbie who has developed into a toughened independent woman insists upon her right to determine the course of her life.

The Nigerian government sends Debbie on a peace mission to the Biafran leader to end the war. She is chosen to negotiate with him solely not because of her superior diplomatic skills but because he had been in love with her before she became involved with Allan Grey, an English man. Emecheta stresses through brutal reminders, the sexist attitude of Nigerian men who see women as objects of sex, and therefore, raises the voice of direct feminist protest in contemporary African Literature. She explicitly denounces the sexual status quo. Debbie unlike Emecheta's other heroines is determined to overcome the natal handicap of the female. “She is also the most vociferous and militant of them all” (Ogunjimi 1997, 32). The protagonist rises beyond tribe and religion owing to her western education. She places her nation first and criticizes the corrupt nature of politicians.

As a responsible person in Nigeria, one did not go into politics to introduce reforms but to get what one could of the national cake and to use part of it to help one's vast extended family, the village of one's origin, and if possible, the whole tribe; at least in this way much of the ill-gotten money returned to the society (16).

The romantic notions about war, harbored by Debbie, are soon shattered. She is gang-raped by soldiers and suffers trauma. For the Nigerian soldiers, she is not more than a piece of female flesh. Debbie sees another gruesome side of the war as she witnesses the brutal killing of a pregnant woman in the course of the mission. Despite the nightmarish experience and her mother's plead to discontinue her journey and settle down as all African girls do, Debbie, a professional soldier, is determined to complete her mission. She travels across war-torn Nigeria. As a typical product of a patriarchal society, Salihu Lawal, attempts to rape Debbie. She retorts back in a calculated manner and wrecks him emotionally. Lawal is dumbfounded as “he was being confronted by a new kind of woman and he could not understand it” (167).

Debbie is perturbed at the rape of her beloved land and the murder of its people and is more concerned for her Igbo companions. In the company of struggling African women companions she realizes that apart from western education, a knowledge of the African lifestyle is also a must. The journey to Biafra is thus educative for her. "Debbie and her group had started trotting ahead, aware that it was the only way to survive" (183). The African Women's experiences of war reveal to them some harsh realities about their roles as women in society. It encourages solidarity and female bonding, which enables them to confront and conquer the dangers to which they are exposed. This reflects the innate toughness of Black women. Debbie and other women slowly move across the hostile territory avoiding the soldiers. Emecheta, through Debbie, Uzoma, and other women, who confront the futility of a male war, reveals their inner strength, their resilience, patience, fortitude, resourcefulness, and their adaption to the different situations of the war. These African women come out successfully when confronted with the battle for survival.

Despite all the hurdles, Debbie eventually reaches her destination Biafra but is shocked and disgraced by Abosi's refusal to a ceasefire. He is amazed to see Debbie as a negotiator, sent to influence him. To demoralize her, he calls her 'little you' but Debbie resents his egocentric behavior saying, "I am me. Debbie, the daughter of Ogedemgbe. Tell me, if I were a man' [...] would you have dismissed my mission?" (227). Through Abosi

admires her courage, he considers her mission a practical joke played by Momoh. Debbie ignores his sarcasm and is still committed to bringing peace. She says, "I forgave those who killed my father because I thought that from the deaths of men like him would rise a new African nation. But that is not to be. So, give in, Abosi, now, and do it with" (227).

Debbie vehemently accuses the western powers and holds them responsible for the present destruction by supplying arms and ammunition to the Nigerian army. She exposes their hypocrisy in sparking the conflict and then seeking to play peacemakers. Neo-colonial aspirations fuel the delicate ethnic situation and Ibos, Hausas and Yorubas butcher each other.

The first half of the novel gives an account of the events preceding the handing over of an independent Nigerian state, by the colonial regime, to a democratically elected government. The polarized tribal interests are a matter of grave concern to the departing colonialists who wish to retain their hold on oil-rich Nigeria by ensuring the election of a government favorable to western powers. Debbie soon realizes the cunning role played by these powers in fanning tribal conflicts by providing them with arms and military training. Bayo Ogunjimi contends:

The imperialist machine is shown flexing its muscles, forming patriarchy that permeates the core and periphery of western society. Apart from the contribution of colonialism to creating the crisis that led to imperialist rule, imperialism enhances the 'masculine psychosis' suffered by the warlords of the Nigerian Civil War (Ogunjimi 1997, 32).

Emecheta has made Debbie the epitome of a New Woman. All her decisions right from joining the army to maintaining a relationship with Alan Grey asserts her individuality, independence, and Europeanised — liberated way of living. At the end of the war, she rejects Grey's marriage proposal because she does not want to become the wife of an exploiter of her nation. In her rejection of Grey, she shows that a woman need not succumb to her tribulations and she finally emerges as a 'New Woman' who according to Beatrice Stegeman:

[R]epresents a theory of personhood where the individual exists as an independent entity rather than her, kinship relations, where she has a responsibility to realize her potential for happiness rather than to accept her role, where she has indefinable value rather than quantitative financial worth, and where she must reason about her own values rather than fit into a stereotyped tradition (Stegeman 1974, 2)

According to Katherine Frank, *Destination Biafra* is the most forthright feminist novel to date, stepping beyond the confines of domestic life, to imagine the role women have to play out in the political struggles of their countries. Debbie Ogedemgbe as she points out is:

The most compelling example we have of the New Woman in Africa. She embodies a liberating ideal, of potentiality, of a rich, active, and fulfilling future for African women, and it is an autonomous future she embraces, a future without men (Frank 1987, 29).

Debbie has plans to help orphans. As a prospective writer, she also has a manuscript to publish '*Destination Biafra*', a book for children, where she "shall tell those orphans the story of how a few ambitious soldiers from Sandhurst tried to make their dream a reality." Emecheta is of the view that the various roles being performed by Debbie in the novel as that

of a daughter, soldier, single mother, and prospective writer represent the forces of change that challenge the limited roles performed by women. Her determination to overcome wartime difficulties makes her an apotheosis of the African New Woman.

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# Representation and Construction of Femininities: An Analysis of Images of Women in Indian Theatre and Cinema

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## *Abstract*

*Film and theatre are largely responsible for not only creating but also disseminating prevalent ideas of hegemonic femininity. They also play a major role in generating the counter narrative of oppositional femininity. The fictional characters serve as 'cultural templates' that serve as the idealized standard of femininity to which women are expected to and aspire to live up to. It is not just innocuous entertainment but propagation of culturally sanctioned gender images which are consequently emulated or contested by women in society. According to the patriarchal norms of femininity ubiquitous in Indian culture, women are supposed to be 'pretty,' 'timid,' 'submissive,' 'obedient' etc. which is how Dattani writes his female characters in Bravely Fought the Queen. However, more recently there have been attempts at creating images of women asserting their individuality and reclaiming the power denied to them by patriarchy. The present study looks at the representation of several female characters in the movie Thappad which presents the central theme of domestic violence and how each woman character in their own space through their reaction to it represent the ideals of dominant, hegemonic, subordinate and oppositional femininities. My paper analyses and evaluates, through the lens of critical rhetorical analysis, the representation of women.*

*Keywords: film and theatre, patriarchy, hegemonic femininity, representation*

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In the twenty first century which is supposed to be the post feminist era where gender equality should be a given and a basic human right, the representation of women in film and theatre has been a topic of much discussion and debate. Cinema and theatre are the perfect place to better understand the prevalent ethos and ideology of a cultural collective i.e. they are one of the most authentic reflections of the true mood and changing scenario of the society producing it. In the words of Shekhawat (2009), "cinema influences an individual's behaviour, perception and position in his culture and society and hence encompasses all the multifaceted aspects integral to society. The issue of projection of women also occupies a unique place". However, as pointed out these mediums are not merely limited to reflection but also influencing and shaping society as a whole. The socially constructed attributes of masculinity and femininity that are sanctioned to men and women as appropriate and desirable are often usually the same as what disempowers and limits them. Apart from other arenas, film and theatre are especially ripe and unique sites for enquiry and analysis as it "disseminates gendered images and thus fictitious representations of masculinities and femininities" (Charlebois, 2010: 93). Through these fictional characters the audience is not

just informed but simultaneously influenced about the notions of dominant, hegemonic, subordinate and oppositional femininities and masculinities which subsequently allow them the agency to critically analyse and contest these representations. Through my paper I would attempt to look at the female characters in Dattani's *Bravely Fought the Queen* and Sinha's *Thappad* which were staged and released respectively 29 years apart, to look at how the female characters are assigned characteristics of hegemonic femininity and if and how they subvert it to exhibit other types of oppositional femininities.

Herein lies the need to elaborate on the meaning of hegemonic femininity. Borrowing from Gramsci's concept, simply put, hegemony is power/oppression which is naturalised over time through consent and not coercion. So hegemonic femininity are those characteristics of women which society and patriarchy sanctions and deems appropriate which includes but is not limited to being pretty, slim, fair, docile, submissive, obedient, soft-spoken, sacrificial, all enduring etc. and have been naturalized over time. But as is the case with any hegemonic force, it is always accompanied by a counter-hegemonic or oppositional force. In the folds of oppositional femininity come women who revolt against these norms or do not submit to being what is expected of and allowed to them. These are the 'anomalous difficult' women. These are the women who do not submit to the norms of patriarchal oppression and reclaim the power that they have full rights to.

Since its inception in the 1930s, most female representations in film and theatre have a common thread- they are often reduced to misogynistic ideals. The perfect woman is a supporting character in a man's life, his love interest, allowed a career only when the job profile seemed 'nurturing'. She is frail, submissive, dependent, vacuous and only concerned with superficial issues like beauty. Even in movies like 'Mother India' where the woman protagonist gets a more substantial role, the foundation of the portrayal remains the same. When we move further into the seventies and eighties, women get another dimension- the vamp or the femme fatale, the sultry woman lying in wait to entrap and entice the leading men. These representations pigeonholed women into restrictive binaries which in turn also disallowed women in society to break the mould and be anything else.

For the purpose of analysis I have selected two pieces- Mahesh Dattani's play *Bravely fought the Queen* which was first staged in Mumbai, 1991 and won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1998 and Anubhav Sinha's *Thappad* which released in 2020. The choice was prompted by the fact that both the pieces have women as their central characters, and what one could even term as 'women-centric'. Both use the trope of domestic violence to an extent as a catalyst for other events. *Thappad*, though puts a woman in the central position would not fall into the category of parallel cinema but mainstream popular cinema.

True art, according to many scholars, is not meant to teach or preach but primarily to provide delight. Dattani champions this school of thought wherein he tries to keep his art free from any theory, appealing to all sections of society, universal in taste and flavour and not limited to any particular caste, creed or class (Prasad, 2007: 262). Dattani is also often called an avante garde feminist whose subtle sensibility aroused by the suffering of individual women against the compulsions of society can portray complex and nuanced characters with ease. In his play *Bravely Fought the Queen* there are four primary women characters and some other secondary characters that are mentioned but not present. The play revolves around a typical Gujarati Indian family which has Baa (the mother/matriarch), her two sons- Jiten and Nitin, and their respective wives Dolly and Alka who are also sisters.

The older couple also have a daughter named Daksha who is never shown on stage but is an important part of the plot. Other than these women there is Lalitha, the wife of Sridhar, an employee at the brothers' advertising company, an old homeless woman who is often spotted outside the couples' adjoining twin homes and Dolly and Alka's mother who is mentioned. The play opens with Lalitha coming over to meet Dolly to discuss a masquerade ball that the former needs to host on behalf of her husband's business venture for a women's nightwear and undergarments company. From the opening scene itself we are introduced to the women as characters playing to the norms of hegemonic femininity. Dolly is 'dolling' herself up for a social gathering with her husband where she needs to play the perfect 'arm candy' wife. Lalitha, on the other hand, is playing the dutiful wife who has come to assist her husband's boss's wife, to whom she is socially subservient, to organise a ball that could help further her husband's career. She too makes an anecdotal reference to how she maintains her physical attractiveness in a similar manner by applying face masks and egg on the hair. Women are, in this milieu, mostly relegated to doing meaningless chores that only aide their men's self indulgence. Even their emotions and its expressions are restricted through the metaphor of the face mask. Lalitha, who on the surface seems the most liberated of them all also has her world revolving around her husband, his needs, his achievements and meaningless hobbies like bonsai which itself is another metaphor for the women whose growth is stunted and branches clipped. Even her movement is dependent on her husband who drops and picks her up from places she needs to be. However, this devotion is not returned by the husband who indulges in intercourse with a prostitute to satisfy his ego and spite his boss without a second thought.

Alka, the younger sister and Nitin's wife initially appears to be a little more spirited but the facade soon falls away and we see how she has been repressing her grief and is an equal victim of patriarchy. She has been tricked into marrying her brother's homosexual partner who hardly has any interest in her and is carrying on an affair with an auto driver behind her back. The sisters, to fill the void of physical pleasure denied to them, have created the imaginary Kanhaiya (the temporary cook and an embodiment of Krishna, the god). She enjoys dancing in the rain but is berated for it. She was physically violated by her elder brother when she was younger for being dropped home with a boy and has no agency or power whatsoever over her own life which has turned her into an alcoholic.

Baa, the bed ridden matriarch of the family has had her own traumatic experiences with patriarchy. She was married to a big, brawny, dark complexioned man who was violent towards both her and her sons. And though her elder son turned out to be almost like the father- cruel and violent, she ardently tried to shelter the younger son which she believes is the reason for his being homosexual. She, the former victim, is now the carrier of patriarchy and incites her sons to beat up their wives and throw them out of the house at talking back to her. She dislikes her daughters-in-law because they are born to a woman who is not legitimately married to their father. Their mother was tricked into a relationship with a man who already had a wife and four children. Baa calls their mother a 'whore' and detests their brother, Praful, for 'polluting' her beloved Nitin. It is on her prompting that Jiten hits his pregnant wife and causes their daughter to be born spastic and physically deformed. This guilt constantly plagues Baa which is why she wants to bequeath her house to her granddaughter.

All these women perfectly maintain the norms of hegemonic femininity. They are for the most part what society calls good women, good wives on the outside despite the emotional and mental toll it takes on them. They keep up their physical beauty; act as the perfect companion to their husbands in social situations; are obedient, subservient, submissive, and meek and if ever they explode at the injustices doled out to them, they are quick to calm down and get back in line and live their lives at the mercy of their husbands and patriarchal mother in law without any power or agency. In that way even the title of the play is ironic. The queen being talked about is Laxmibai of Jhansi, a woman of valour who fought wars for her nation. However, in the play the women (the queens) have fought their wars and have all been defeated despite their bravery. Their fights have resulted in nothing.

On the other end of this spectrum is Anubhav Sinha's 2020 film *Thappad* (The Slap) loosely based on Christor Tsiolkas' 2008 novel of the same name. The film uses the trope of a slap to bring to light the problematic nature of patriarchal conjugal relationships rampant in India. The story revolves around Amrita (played by Taapsee Pannu), a homemaker, who appears to be in a loving relationship with her seemingly progressive husband. It is during a social gathering celebrating her husband's professional success that this 'perfect' life is disrupted through a slap which in turn exposes the deep-seated issues in their relationship. Sinha very consciously and masterfully manipulates the tone of the film to clearly demarcate between the two periods- pre and post slap. There are recurring shots of the repetitive morning routine that Amrita follows every single day and it is clearly noticeable how post violence she wakes up to the miserable realities of her own marriage. The disillusionment is clear and almost overt. Her world revolved around her husband, his needs, his well-being, his family. And she was happy to play second fiddle. At one point she even proudly claims that they had pre-decided that he would manage the finances and his career and she would run the home. The slap disrupts her perceptions about her place in the relationship. The first half tries to capture this disillusionment through the loss of her spark, her usual joy. And when she realises this she sees the world more clearly and realises the bond she shares with the other female characters. She is no longer any different from her estranged mother-in-law, her regularly violated house help, or her suppressed mother who gave up on her dreams of becoming a singer in favour of a family. The universe these characters exist in is a matter of fact lived in universe that makes it all the more relatable. The repetitive shots of the morning routine of Amrita pre and post the slap are same yet deafeningly different. The film opens with a wife making tea and breakfast for her husband and closes with a 'woman' doing the same but this time for herself.

Her husband Vikram becomes the embodiment of patriarchy. He is the typical Indian man who believes he is a feminist. He is a mostly loving husband who does not refrain from making distasteful sexist remarks about his single mother neighbour when she can afford an affluent lifestyle, almost better than him. However, given the culture and environment he has grown up in, he is inconsiderate, self centred and extremely entitled. But Vikram does not stand alone; he is the prototype for the intentional or unintentional entitlement of most other men in the film. His misdemeanour with his wife acts as a catalyst to expose the characters of other male characters. The oppressive nature of his own father and brother, the ignorance of Amrita's father and brother, the normalizing of the event by Vikram's colleagues and the condescending and sexually abusive nature of journalist Rohit (Amrita's lawyer's husband). On the other hand, when Amrita decides to leave her marriage it gives rise to a chain

reaction that legitimises the struggles of other women around her. It is an eye opener for the old and young alike- from her patriarchally conditioned mother and mother-in-law to the teenage neighbour next door whose worldview evolves because of it.

These characters are not one dimensional or monotonous. But their reactions to the slap are vastly different. What connects almost all of them is their acceptance of the event, their spirit of compromise and normalizing domestic violence. They have all to an extent internalised the norms of hegemonic femininity that directs the woman to be enduring and submissive and forgive her husband such transgressions under the pretext of love and momentary bout of anger. They have accepted the unequal nature of power in marital relationships. Sinha captures the reactions of all major characters immediately after the slap has taken place. And though the incident with Amrita sparks of the reaction, it is not only her story. It is of several other women who have been playing to the norms of patriarchy all their lives without protest. Amrita is the first one who takes on the mantle of oppositional femininity and stands up for herself and against the wrong that has been meted out to her. In a later scene he makes clear the parallel between Amrita and her house help Sunita, who is a victim of domestic violence on a regular basis. At a juncture, their stories merge and the class boundaries dissolve. Where Sunita, owing to her circumstances is forced to live with violence, Amrita can afford to protest. Their struggles might be similar but the remedy vastly different. Simultaneously it also compares and contrasts Amrita's condition with her high profile lawyer who though a career driven ambitious woman successful in her own right is an equal victim of patriarchy. In that way, *Thappad* does not level all experiences. It instead acknowledges the socio-economic and familial differences of its characters and justifies their reactions and responses to the situation.

*Thappad*, is the story of a woman reclaiming her power that is denied to her by patriarchy and in the process making way for other women around her to follow suit. It does not villainize the men but rather gives hope that they can change and women can and should stand up for their rights. This is especially refreshing because of the usual male gaze that we are used to in Indian cinema where abuse and violence is glorified and/or trivialized. In his 1972 essay titled 'Ways of Seeing', John Berger points out that "men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at". A counter argument to this is put forth by feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey about the 'female gaze' which simply put is (mostly heterosexual) women telling women's stories. Of which *Thappad* is a perfect example as the screenplay has been collaboratively written by Mrunmayee Lagoo and the director Anubhav Sinha. Here the gaze is that of a woman but not in a way that it alienates the male audience thus making it effective. A woman at the helm makes the representation much more personal and believable. This representation was hard to come by in the earlier decades when Hindi cinema for the most part was a 'man's business'. This affords the film to depict the realities of the female experience in a more sensitive and authentic manner.

The film, though not perfect, through its titular slap exposes the susceptibility of an otherwise perfect marriage to turn into a power dynamic between two gendered individuals. The slap becomes a metaphor for the male entitlement that is entrenched within the most primal intimate relationships of co-existence. The problem lies with the very fact that the slap's occurrence that leads one to question the facade of equality in a marriage. It refuses to look past or underplay its gravity and urges the audience not to look away. Though the film starts out with women who are compliant to their own oppression and living life as per the



rules of hegemonic femininity by the end of it most realise the error of their ways and subvert the norms to create a space for themselves through oppositional femininity to exist not as subsidiary characters in the lives of men but as individuals in their own right.

Cinema, in India, is one of the most easily accessible and most popular forms of entertainment with its reach extending to billions but it transcends the limitations of being merely a means of leisure and escape. The idolisation and admiration actors enjoy lays testimony to the fact. Thus, in part, the medium is responsible for the representations and conceptions that get normalised in society. It can normalise films like *Kabir Singh* (2019) which portray abuse and toxic masculinity as desirable in a romantic relationship and still make the protagonist appear a victim who eventually wins forgiveness and his 'lady love'. The commercial success of such a film is proof enough of the rampant misogyny present in films which view women solely as objects of male desire with no agency of their own. Some films have indeed tried to tackle the issue of 'feminism' but the primary economic aspirations have led to the creation of some 'faux-feministic' movies like *Mission Mangal* which is about female scientists but needs a male actor like Akshay Kumar to attract audiences. As Shekhawat (2019) points out "despite being key players in the development of the nation, there are films which do not treat women at par with the male counterparts and their role is a marginalized one in some of the films".

However, all hope is not lost. With changing times a lot of female writers and directors are taking up the mantle and trying to reclaim the space on screen that women deserve but were denied. Films like *Gully Boy* by Zoya Akhtar, *Fire* and *Earth* by Deepa Mehta, *English Vinglish* by Gauri Shinde, *Lipstick Under My Burqa* by Alankrita Shrivastava have well fleshed out female characters who are not merely the 'sidekicks' anymore. Women characters are no longer just stereotypes with only two possible outcomes—the 'sanskaari' good girl or the villainous vamp. Patriarchy runs deep in the veins of Indian society and that is naturally reflected in the films too. Mediums such as film and theatre are primarily finance driven and straying away from successful established stereotypes to put women in the forefront creates a risk. So the onus of breaking the vicious cycle of supply and demand also falls largely upon the audience.

In its close to eighty year history, mainstream Bollywood is only very recently seeing female leads taking up various roles. From the sacrificial mother and hapless damsel in distress women are now taking charge of their own destiny. In the interim period of twenty nine years between *Bravely Fought the Queen* and *Thappad* the condition and representation of women has definitely seen a major change. And slowly but steadily the audiences are becoming more accepting of it too which can be attested through the commercial and critical success of films like *Tumhari Sulu*, *NH 10*, *Pink*, *Bulbul* etc. Yet, this is not the end of the road. It is just the beginning. Women need to be represented better and in a more sensitive and realistic manner. And there still remains a large population of women on the margins and intersections of caste, class, gender that has not yet received representation and need to be represented first and foremost.

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## **The Art of Adaptation: Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Vishal Bhardwaj's *Maqbool***

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### *Abstract*

*This paper focusses on the comparative analysis of William Shakespeare's play, Macbeth and its screen adaptation Maqbool (2004) by Indian film director Vishal Bhardwaj. Shakespeare is one of the most produced screen writer in cinematic history and his works have transcended the barriers of language and culture (Brown, 2011). Although, the Hindi film industry, popularly known as Bollywood is replete with examples of producing films which are inspired by the Bard's works (Kapadia, 2014) Bhardwaj's films stand out because the filmmaker expresses his indebtedness to Shakespeare in no uncertain terms (Shahani and Charry, 2014). The Researchers through this exercise have studied the extent to which Vishal Bhardwaj has adapted the Bard's play into his film. The degree to which the screen adaptation has remained true to the original text has also been analyzed. The Researchers have also analyzed how similar or different the major characters represented on the screen are from those portrayed in the play. The effect of change in language, culture and lifestyle have also been discussed in this paper.*

*Keyword: Shakespeare, Vishal Bhardwaj, Adaptation, Macbeth, Maqbool*

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### **Introduction**

Film adaptation is regarded as the practice of transferring an entire printed source text or a part of it – it could be a story, a play or a novel – into a feature film for the screen. Cardwell notes that the process of adaptation is usually taken to be concerned with “the different ways in which the adaptation expresses the same basic narrative as its source book” (Cardwell, 2002).

John Harrington in his book *Film and/as Literature* claims that a third of all films ever made have been adapted from novels and if one includes other literary forms such as dramas and short stories that estimate might well be 65 per cent or more (Harrington,1977). Almost all the works of classic literature like *Romeo and Juliet* and *Sherlock Holmes* have been adapted for films, some of them many times and in multiple languages, setting or formats. For instance, there are more than 200 film versions of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's

*Sherlock Holmes*, from a very short silent film made in 1900 by Arthur Marvin to the masterful version starring Benedict Cumberbatch which premiered on HBO (Ledwith and Enoch, 2012). There are innumerable direct and indirect screen adaptations of William Shakespeare's tragic love story *Romeo and Juliet*, starting from a 1900 French version called *Romeo 'et Juliet* directed by Clement Maurice (Abel, 2005).

In fact, as far as the adaptations of novels into films or television versions are concerned, the Guinness Book of Records credits William Shakespeare as the most filmed author in any language. The Guinness Book of Records lists 420 feature length film and TV versions of Shakespeare's play that have been produced or adapted (Lynch, 2014).

One of the major reasons why Shakespeare proves so perennially popular when it comes to screen adaptations is because a film director is not allured only to the quality of story but also towards the immense freedom in imagining the settings and the constant play between reality, fantasy and myth (Rosenthal, 2000). Another reason which can be attributed to Shakespeare being a popular choice when it comes to adaptations is that Shakespeare's plays do not invite many copyright hassles also. (Chakravorthy, 2014). They narrate themes that are easy to translate onto any backdrop because of their timeless, universal appeal. Moreover, very importantly, other than being classic templates of art they are invariable crowd pullers at the box office.

Given the fact that the Bard of Avon is the most produced screen writer in cinematic history, it is safe to assume that the phenomenon of his works being adapted on screen has transcended the linguistic and cultural barriers (Brown, 2011). Although numerous screen adaptations of William Shakespeare's works have been produced in the last century and filmmakers still continue to milk Shakespeare for their box office profits, many critics argue that the essence of Shakespeare exists is in the language (Rosenthal, 2000). One of the major questions that crops up while discussing adaptations of Shakespeare's works for the celluloid is that if the filmmaker deliberately chooses to alter the language, does the final adapted product still have the essence of Shakespeare?

It is in the backdrop of this question and the discussion above that Shakespeare's adaptations made by Indian film director Vishal Bhardwaj make for an engrossing study. Vishal Bhardwaj adapted three of Shakespeare's leading tragedies i.e. *Macbeth*, *Othello* and *Hamlet* into films titled *Maqbool* (2004), *Omkaara* (2006) and *Haider* (2014) respectively.

Although, the Hindi film industry, popularly known as Bollywood is replete with examples of films inspired from the Bard's work, starting from 1927 silent film *Dil Farosh* based on *The Merchant of Venice*, *Haithili Dulhan* (1932) based on *Taming of the Shrew*, *Khoon ka Khoon* (1935) based on *Hamlet*, *Said-e-Havas* (1936) based on *King John* and *Angoor* (1982) based on *Comedy of Errors*, (Kapadia, 2014), Bhardwaj's films stand out because the filmmaker expresses his indebtedness to Shakespeare in no uncertain terms ((Shahani and Charry, 2014).

While comparing Bhardwaj's films with Shakespeare's plays the question arises that if the language and settings of the text are changed while adapting, is the final product still recognizably Shakespearean? For the want of answer to this question a thorough comparative content analysis of Shakespeare's works and their screen adaptations made by Vishal Bhardwaj is called for.

The scope of this paper is limited to the comparative analysis and discussion between Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Bhardwaj's *Maqbool*. Plot and storyline, character

representation, language and cultural setting are the broad units of analysis for a comparison between the film and the play on which the film is based. The aim of this exercise is not only to make a balanced comparative analysis but also to individually appreciate the works produced by Shakespeare and Bhardwaj and not undermine any one of them at the cost of the other.

### ***Maqbool and Macbeth - Plot and Storyline Comparison***

Both the play and the film start on a windy, stormy night. While the witches enigmatically state “Fair is foul and foul is fair”, thus establishing the atmosphere of the play, the gory future of Mumbai is foretold in the film by Inspector Pandit (Om Puri) and Inspector Purohit (Naseeruddin Shah). In a masterfully crafted scene at the beginning of the movie the viewers are warned by the inspector duo of the inevitable bloodshed in Mumbai. As Macbeth in *Macbeth*, Maqbool (Irrfan) is shown as one of the most trusted and able guys in Abba Ji’s (Pankaj Kapur) gang. The only difference being that while Macbeth was a noble Scot and a valiant army general during King Duncan’s regime, Maqbool is shown as the henchman of the Mumbai underworld don Jahangir Khan alias Abba Ji. Vishal Bhardwaj’s screen adaptation of *Macbeth*, rechristened as *Maqbool* remains largely true to its source material in context of the sequence of events, storytelling and exploration of themes like love, lust, power, corruption, greed and guilt. However, there were some gaping differences which get foregrounded when comparing the play with its screen adaptation:

1. In the play it is the Witch’s prophecy alone which polluted Macbeth’s mind and set him on a path of self-destruction. But in *Maqbool*, although effected by Inspector Pandit’s foretelling, Maqbool is largely motivated by his love for Abba Ji’s mistress Nimmi (Tabu). In Shakespeare’s play, Lady Macbeth does instigate Macbeth to commit regicide by slaying King Duncan, his motivations and desires, however, are limited to that of Scottish throne. In its screen adaptation, Maqbool’s love and lust for Nimmi is far greater than his desire to usurp Abba Ji’s position.
2. In the play, Macduff kills Macbeth and King Duncan’s elder son Malcolm is declared as the new King of Scotland. But in the movie, although Maqbool is killed by Riyaz Boti (Macduff), there is no clarity on who has or will take over Abba Ji’s underworld empire. Further, at the end of the movie, Abba Ji’s daughter Sameera and her husband Guddu adopt Maqbool and Nimmi’s child after both of them have died whereas in the play there is no mention of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth having a child.

### ***Character Representation***

While William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* had 15 major characters who, in some way or other played a part in shaping up the play, Vishal Bhardwaj’s screen adaptation *Maqbool* trimmed down the number of major characters to nine.

**King Duncan and Jahangir Khan alias Abbaji:** In *Macbeth*, King Duncan is the just and noble King of Scotland who is soon expected to relinquish his title and pass it on to a worthy successor. King Duncan is presented as a father figure to his trusted General Macbeth. Duncan in the play represents order and peace and his well plotted regicide kicks off a period of turmoil and chaos in his empire. It will not be wrong to say that although King Duncan is

shown as wise character but his affection and blind trust in Macbeth lead him to his death. Abba Ji, on the other hand is presented as an ageing gang lord living with his Mistress Nimmi, controlling and ruling the Mumbai mafia with a vice-like grip. Abba Ji, as is the case with King Duncan is ably supported by his trusted men Maqbool and Kaka.

In bringing on the screen King Duncan as Jahangir Khan, the director has turned the character completely upside down. Gone is the generosity and sensitivity of King Duncan and Vishal Bhardwaj replaces it with a menacing, vengeful Abba Ji. Although Abba Ji retains the firmness and principles of King Duncan's character in some scenes, but the overall traits of his character are entirely different from that of Duncan. Another aspect where the movie character differs from that of his counterpart in the play is in regard to his married life. In *Macbeth*, little or nothing is revealed of King Duncan's married life other than the fact that he has two sons named Malcolm and Donalbain. But in Abba Ji's case he has a daughter named Sameera, but he is also shown living with his young mistress Nimmi, who in turn is robbed off his affection and attention once Abba Ji befriends a much younger and attractive actress. King Duncan had two sons but no daughter, Abba Ji is shown as not having any son and therefore without any heir to his mafia empire.

One thing which Abba Ji's character aptly adapts from the play is his relationship with Maqbool. As in the play, Abba Ji is like a father figure to Maqbool and nothing brings this fact out more clearly than the scene in the movie in which Abba Ji comes out of jail and says to Maqbool "*Woh Thapad uss Police wale ne tere nahi, Abba Ji ke gaal par maara tha*". Abba Ji just like King Duncan, has unfailing faith in Maqbool and ultimately pays the price for trusting Maqbool more than he should have.

**Macbeth and Maqbool:** As Shakespeare's play begins, Macbeth is presented as a great warrior, Thane of Glamis and Thane of Cawdor. Shakespeare showcases Macbeth as a man of his word who lives by the sword and dies by it, the one who has crushed rebellion after rebellion with his just and mighty sword. Although Vishal Bhardwaj does not present Maqbool as a well-respected character or someone who is rated very highly in society because of his being a goon, yet, Maqbool is a strong willed character who is ruthless, short tempered and laconic.

While Macbeth in the play is clearly driven by his lust for Duncan's throne, which in turn was fuelled by the prophecy made by the three witches and later on instigated by his wife, Lady Macbeth, in Maqbool's case, his love for Abbaji's Mistress Nimmi acts as a far greater motivation than his craving for Abba Ji's throne. The movie explores Maqbool's relationship with Nimmi to a much deeper extent than Macbeth's relationship his wife Lady Macbeth. Before commenting further on Maqbool's relationship with Nimmi, it is important to highlight the fact that while Macbeth and Lady Macbeth were clearly married, the screen adaptation shows Maqbool in an illicit relation with Nimmi which leads to the complex triangle involving Maqbool, Nimmi and Abba Ji.

In the play, although Lady Macbeth is the instigator and the party to all the sins Macbeth commits, their personal life is presented as more of a see-saw journey than a life of bliss. In the beginning of the play, both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are shown as equal partners in affection and ambition, wanting the throne for themselves, but as Macbeth rises in power and rank his affection for his wife lessens. Nothing shows the rift between the two and their marriage better than the last act where Lady Macbeth dies, steeped into the madness of

hand washing and sleep walking, while Macbeth obsesses over his enemies.

Contrary to this, Bhardwaj's Maqbool and Nimmi are in a relationship which is not completely filled with bliss or happiness, but it is a relationship that brings both the characters closer to each other through all the mayhem and chaos around them. The closeness of Maqbool and Nimmi's relationship is beautifully depicted in a scene where Nimmi expresses to Maqbool that she's unable to sleep at night because she's haunted by the bad deeds they have committed, and while Maqbool is shown talking to his business partner on the phone, he gives priority to Nimmi and consoles her. Another touching scene comes at the end of the movie where Nimmi collapses in Maqbool's arms and asks him if their love for each other was pious or not.

**Lady Macbeth and Nimmi:** Lady Macbeth and Nimmi's characters are among the most important characters in both *Macbeth* and *Maqbool*. Not only both these female characters instigate Macbeth/ Maqbool to slay King Duncan/ Abba Ji, both them are actually complicit in the crime which their partners commit. In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth as Macbeth's wife, a woman who desires of becoming a queen, someone who is manipulative and has a way with words. Lady Macbeth is in fact the one who plants the seeds of regicide in Macbeth's mind after the prophecy. On the other hand, Nimmi is presented as a woman who dreamt of becoming a movie actress and somehow ended up in Abba Ji's household as his mistress.

While in the play, Lady Macbeth has a powerful presence in the first two acts, her presence and role in the play diminishes considerably after King Duncan's assassination. From being a manipulative instigator trying to fulfil her own desires through Macbeth's actions, she becomes a silent spectator to Macbeth's sinful deeds as the play progresses. Contrariwise, in the movie, Vishal Bhardwaj presents Nimmi as a character who sets the ball rolling as she is the one for whom Maqbool feels compelled to kill Abba Ji. Nimmi's character develops swiftly as the movie progresses; from an enchantingly beautiful woman wanting Maqbool's love and affection, to the ambitious partner in crime wanting Maqbool to succeed and finally to a woman haunted by her guilt, too full of remorse and weak to act.

### **Witches and Inspector Pandit and Inspector Purohit**

The three witches in Shakespeare's play are very complex characters as there appears to be no real motivation behind their actions, and although they symbolize evil and are manipulative, Shakespeare makes no attempt to clarify why the Witches chose Macbeth and not someone else. Vishal Bhardwaj deftly took the supernatural element of the play out of the equation and replaced it with two corrupt cops- Inspector Pandit and Inspector Purohit having a penchant for astrology. Bhardwaj's decision to continue with the witches on screen could have ruined the overall tone of the movie which is rooted in realism.

Like Shakespeare, Bhardwaj makes no attempt to justify the actions of Inspector Pandit and Inspector Purohit and offers little by way of an explanation when it comes to delving into their motivations. Although the sinister inspector duo has more presence in the film as compared with their counterparts in the play, yet both these characters, in the movie and the play, are nothing more than agents of chaos.

## Banquo and Kaka

In the play, Banquo is Macbeth's ally as both of them are generals in King Duncan's army. They are together when they meet the three Witches. After prophesying that Macbeth will become King, the Witches tell Banquo that he will not be a King himself, but Banquo's descendants will be. Later, Macbeth in his lust for power sees Banquo as a threat and has him murdered while Banquo's son Fleance manages to escape. Banquo's ghost returns in a later scene, causing Macbeth to react with alarm during a public feast. Banquo's character is a major character in the play and the only character who is with Macbeth when the witches prophesy about him. In the movie as well, Banquo's screen counterpart Kaka is presented as Maqbool's ally and is present in the courtyard when Inspector Pandit reads Maqbool's *kundli* (horoscope). The first instance where the Director differs in treatment of Banquo's character is when Maqbool's future is being told by Inspector Pandit, prophecy about Kaka and his descendants is more of a passing statement, unlike in the play where the prophecy about Banquo and his descendants being future kings is a major point in the plot.

Vishal Bhardwaj's Kaka is underdeveloped and comes off as if he is just there for the sake of being there. While Banquo as a character is presented in all seriousness, on the other hand Kaka as a standalone character is many a times used by the Director for dark comic relief.

Another aspect of Banquo and Kaka's character which is worth discussing here is his relationship with Macbeth/ Maqbool. It is in the depiction of this relationship where Vishal Bhardwaj is spot on. Like Banquo, Kaka trusts Maqbool blindly, so much so that even when warned by his son Guddu that Maqbool might not be the person he thinks he is, Kaka refuses to listen to him. Although there is no precedence of a conversation like the aforementioned in the play, yet Banquo's loyalty and trust in Macbeth is displayed time and again in the play. The prime example being the scene where he is unsure whether Macbeth committed regicide to gain the throne; he soliloquizes about his doubts but somehow offers his respects to the new King Macbeth and pledges his loyalty.

## Fleance and Guddu

Fleance is Banquo's son in *Macbeth* and one of the first descendants of Banquo who will beget future kings. In *Macbeth*, Fleance is one of those characters who gets mentioned quite a few times but he hardly has a presence himself, whereas in the film he is shown as a novice, learning the ropes of the trade from Maqbool.

Although, Vishal Bhardwaj aptly portrays the threat which Guddu poses to Maqbool's rise, given the fact that Guddu is about to become Jahangir Khan's son in law by virtue of marrying his daughter Sameera, the director takes a complete U-turn on the character by making him one of the most important characters in the movie who is present in almost every second scene, from the beginning to the end.

Bhardwaj presents Guddu as a careless, rookie young man who is still trying to find his feet. As the movie progresses, Guddu and Abba Ji's daughter Sameera are shown in love with each other which makes Guddu an immediate threat to Maqbool's plan of taking over the reins from Abba Ji. Guddu is perhaps the only character in the movie who doubts Maqbool's intentions and warns his father beforehand, only for his warning to fall on deaf ears. It is not clear whether Guddu's child or even Guddu himself becomes the future kingpin of the crime family, neither does the director makes any attempt to clarify this. But what the



director aptly showcases is that Guddu's fight was never for Abba Ji's chair nor for avenging his father's murder. Guddu fought to protect Sameera, the one whom he loved and perhaps by adopting Maqbool and Nimmi's child, the Director symbolically tries to drive home the point that Guddu and Sameera are about to start a new life.

### **Macduff and Riyaz Boti**

Macduff plays a pivotal role in Shakespeare's play as he suspects Macbeth of murdering Duncan and eventually kills him in the final act of the play. Shakespeare presents Macduff as the avenging hero who helps save Scotland from Macbeth's tyranny. Moralistic and righteous Macduff contrasts with sinful and treacherous Macbeth. In fact, in most of his plays, Shakespeare employs contrapuntal technique to lay bare polyphonic nature of life itself. What is interesting to note here is that Vishal Bhardwaj's Macduff, Riyaz Boti emerges as a minor character in the overall scheme of things although it is he who shoots Maqbool in the final scene, yet his character is nowhere close to that of memorable Macduff's in the play.

Riyaz Boti is introduced as Mughal's son, the traitor who is killed by Maqbool in the first two minutes of the movie. Thereafter Riyaz appears sporadically in the film and even when he does appear, his appearances are sketchy and he is often seen lurking in the background. After Guddu falls out with Maqbool, Riyaz pledges his allegiance to Guddu and decides to avenge his father's murder. This particular development in the movie can be seen in the same light as that of Macduff and Malcolm joining forces in the play to overpower Macbeth. Riyaz Boti's character is so underdeveloped that for a casual viewer the character holds no importance and could be misunderstood as Guddu's hench man.

Not only Macduff himself, his family comprising of Lady Macduff and his son also had their fair share of presence in the play, but in the movie Bhardwaj although shows Riyaz's family but it is more of a blink and the viewer misses the kind of flesh and blood characters that the members of Macduff's family are in Shakespeare's drama. What is surprising is that not only Riyaz Boti's is made a minor player, but even in the scenes in which he is present, his character has no emotional depth thus making it difficult to relate him to Macduff. The only point of commonality between Macduff and Riyaz Boti is that both of them eventually kill Macbeth and Maqbool. Perhaps some cinematic constraint made Vishal Bhardwaj give short shrift to Macbeth and that is why he lacks Macduff's depth.

### ***Social and Cultural Change***

*Macbeth* is set mainly in Scotland, with some parts of the story running parallel in England while *Maqbool* is set in Mumbai.

**Language:** *Macbeth* is written mainly in blank verse, a form of poetry which does not rhyme but uses rhythm to move the verse further. In *Maqbool*, the language of the characters is Hindi with some rich Urdu thrown into the mix. Although the characters shown in the movie are goons and mafia men operating from Mumbai, there is negligible use of the 'Bambabiya' slang which a lot of movies in the same genre employ.

**Life Style and Religion:** In *Macbeth*, every character apart from the three Witches and Hecate are in one way or the other related to the royal corridors of either England or Scotland. Hence, Shakespeare paints a picture of characters living in royalty and opulence even in the times of turmoil and chaos around them. In *Maqbool*, the royal palace of King Duncan is replaced by a middle class house of Abba Ji, where majority of the characters except Maqbool and Kaka live. The actors are neither very ornately dressed, nor are the costumes too flashy or fashionable. One of the most important themes which *Macbeth* explores is that of piety with references to the devil, sins, deeds, afterlife and other biblical imagery. The screen adaptation presents both Muslim and Hindu characters. While Abba Ji and Maqbool are Muslim, others such as the inspectors are Hindus. There is no doubt that the Nimmi's consciousness of her and her paramour's sinfulness weighs heavy on her mind, but the devils, afterlife concerns and other typically Christian notions are missing. This is an example of domestication of the adapted text.

**Location:** As mentioned earlier, a major portion of *Macbeth* is set against the backdrop of Royal castles of Scotland. Other locales which the play explores are England, scenes from the battlefield and the woods. In comparison, the movie's universe is primarily based in the suburbs of Mumbai and its seamier underbelly with an occasional shot of a beach or a marsh land. It will not be wrong to say that with respect to location and background settings, both the play and the movie remain true to geographic location in which the action takes place.

## Conclusion

*Maqbool* and *Macbeth* both follow a similar chain of the events as far the basic story line and plot is concerned. Even *Maqbool*'s climax is similar to that of the play except for a minor deviation of Maqbool getting killed when fleeing rather than in a battle and that the protagonists are shown having a child. As far as character representation is concerned, it can be argued that the Director tweaked with the minor characters of the play more than the main protagonists but the major characters in the movie are well thought out and fully developed, and they follow an arc of their own. The changes made in the language, lifestyle, religion and location in the screen adaptation add an extra layer of intrigue to the already compelling plot of the play while also adding a layer of gravitas to the overall theme and tone of the movie. *Maqbool* in itself is a masterfully crafted and executed movie, with a definitive stamp of Vishal Bhardwaj's unique vision but with enough Shakespeare in it to be considered as a faithful adaptation.

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# "One World One People": Post-Truth Politics and Rebellion in Marvel's *The Falcon and The Winter Soldier*

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## *Abstract*

*A continuation of the movie series released by Marvel Studios, The Falcon and The Winter Soldier, a mini web-series was released in April 2021. This series questions the political nature of representation and touches upon the idea of how boundaries are set around the world only by a selective few. This created system also subjugates the heroes it created for the 'greater good.' The adverse effects of such boundaries on the majority and how they counter-attack the system are played on the screen. This article examines concepts like representation, boundaries, the politics behind them, and how people counter-attack the authorities, through the lens of Post-Truth Politics. As the idea of post-truth was explicit throughout the dialogues of the scenes analysed, a Semiological analysis is done to decode what the scenes intended to convey at both denotative and connotative level.*

*Keywords: Marvel Studios, Post-Truth, Representation, Semiology, Web Series*

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## **Introduction**

A continuation of the movie series released by Marvel Studios, *The Falcon and The Winter Soldier* was streamed on Disney+ (Hotstar) in April 2021. Creator, Malcom Spellman, developed this series based on the Marvel Comic characters 'The Falcon' and 'The Winter Soldier'. The events in this series take place a few weeks after the *Avengers: Endgame*. Marvel Studios is known to create Superhero Stories embedded with socio-political issues. This series is no different. The antagonists of this series are a few frustrated young people who find the world unjust. They want to create a world without boundaries so that everyone gets a fair chance to prove themselves. The plot revolves around Sam Wilson (*The Falcon*) and James 'Bucky' Barnes (*The Winter Soldier*) trying to resolve the conflict between the governments and The Flag Smashers (the rebels). This article examines concepts like representation, boundaries, the politics behind them, and how people counter-attack the authorities, through the lens of Post-Truth Politics.

Post-truth is a phenomenon wherein people accept the 'popular truth', which in reality is a weak form of knowledge, and is based on the opinion of authorities (Harsin; McIntyre). Joshua Forstenzer adds to this notion, "the 'post-truth' character of our politics refers to the relative irrelevance of the value of truth in contemporary public affairs" (5). *The Falcon and The Winter Soldier* has several scenes which highlight Post-Truth Politics. Some characters are directly affected by political agendas, while some stay on the blindside. This series

questions the political nature of representation and touches upon how boundaries are set around the world only by a select few; and depicts the adverse effects of such boundaries on the majority. It gives a voice to those who rebel against the system, but they are labelled unjustly. This created system also subjugates the heroes it created for the 'greater good'. In some instances, the system also erases their history and present, to preserve its future. This article uses the Marvel Series to establish Post-truth in the current era by analysing select instances using Semiotics.

## Methodology

The semiological analysis of the visual signs/images represents a symbolic interaction between the denotative and the connotative meanings. Roland Barthes found that images hold significance in the signs that recipients can connote through their cultural and symbolic backgrounds. Denotation excludes all subjective meanings and refers to the literal meaning of the signs; connotation refers to culturally constructed ideas and meanings that the signs contain (Barthes 34). Here, the connotation is a system comprising signifiers, signified and the process which unites the former to the latter (signification) (Bouzida 1004). This framework, according to Saussurean analysis, may be grounded in synchronic and diachronic analysis. In synchronic analysis, the events co-occur (Monaco 2000). The research has to focus on a pattern of paired oppositions as a paradigmatic structure (Berger 35). This study has employed both syntagmatic and paradigmatic approaches to analyse the illustrations. Paradigmatic analysis requires searching for hidden patterns of opposition hidden in the text (Berger 35). Syntagmatic analysis requires a search for relations of signs with other signs preceding and following them (Berger 35).

How moving images are produced and structured, raise particular theoretical and analytical problems. One of the first researchers to address these problems from a semiotic perspective was the French linguist Christian Metz. In an influential study of how cinematic signifiers are organised, he showed that most films are based on seven types of 'syntagms,' or seven primary series of shots (Jensen 121). He suggested four narrative syntagms that indicate temporal relations between narrative events:

- 1) The scene is the most widely used of a series of shots presenting an event in continuous time and space.
- 2) In the alternating syntagm, there is cross-cutting between several narrative spaces (for example, in a 'chase') and indications of temporal simultaneity between the shots.
- 3) In sequences, the shots indicate discontinuous time: the ordinary sequence is an elliptical construction in which unimportant events and other details are left out.
- 4) The episodic sequence, in comparison, organises the shots so that the omissions suggest a compressed chronological development.

Beside the four narrative syntagms, there are three a-chronological ones:

- 1) The descriptive syntagm is a series of shots suggesting spatial co-presence of people or objects.

2) The bracket syntagm depicts specific aspects of a phenomenon or a concept ('poverty,' 'morning in the city').

3) The parallel syntagm organises two contrasting motifs ('rich and poor,' 'town and country').

Metz intended to describe cinema as a general *langue*, or at least one of its main components structures. However, his framework has also proven helpful for the analysis of individual films (Jensen 121). This research shall use syntagmatic analysis to find the syntagms that create meanings. It shall specifically focus on the three a-chronological syntagms in order to evaluate the concept of post-truth.

## Observations

### Denotative Level

Steve Tesich was unnerved by how people were *for* the 'comfortable falsehoods' *than* 'uncomfortable harsh truths' when he coined the term 'Post-truth' in 1992 (Tesich; Forstenzer). It can be said that the situation has turned only for the worse since then. Though there are occasional rebellions against the system, most people, especially the politicians, have become cosy with fuzzy morals. Post-truth is defined as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" (McIntyre).

*The Falcon and The Winter Soldier* depicts this manipulation of the truth. The higher authorities, a combination of government and influential business *personale*, bend the truth and portray what suits them to the world. In some situations, they even erase some of the histories to save themselves. A person who lived to tell his tale is Isaiah. He is an African American character who was a part of the U.S. Army as a young man. The government wanted to recreate the super-soldier serum given to Steve Rogers. In order to test the different versions of the serum, random soldiers were dosed with them. The soldiers were told these were tetanus shots to help their immunity. However, as the different versions were unstable, many soldiers died, except for Isaiah. Instead of telling him the truth of the situation, the government put him in jail to conduct experiments on him. They declared him dead to his family. Additionally, to bury the truth about recreating the serum or experiments conducted on Isaiah, the government erases his history from their database. It was a strategic deception. As Sam listens to Isaiah's story in disbelief, Isaiah comments, "but they have been doing that for 500 years" (Episode 5). This hints at many more of such similar deceptions covered by the government.

Another thing common in Post-Truth Politics is keeping a bigger, brighter picture at the front for the world to take in, while covering massive misjudgements and mistakes. What the audience or the masses are shown becomes their truth, but it is different from the actual truth. In the series, The Global Repatriation Council (GRC) represents the government. It broadcasts the good deeds undertaken by the GRC through TV advertisements and posters. The advert uses phrases such as, "we are here to help you find your way," "helping you back into your homes and jobs", "helping you navigate changes to society, laws, and borders," and "helping you get back to the way things were" (Episode 3). However, they are

“helping” a limited population. There are many others who do not get these facilities, rather are asked to relocate to help the chosen ones’.

A sharp contrast to the advertisement is what happens to Sam and his sister at the Bank. When they apply for a loan to save their family business, the banker informs Sam that he has nothing to show for his income for the past five years. His sister points out that he was one of those who disappeared in the blip, and how could he have an income if he did not exist. Despite claims to help those who returned from the Blip, and Sam's contribution to help the government, his appeal was rejected.

Karli and her followers, called the Flag Smashers, are those who survived the blip. They are fighting against the GRC for their unfair treatment of the survivors. In discussion with Bucky in Episode 4, Sam tries to argue for Karli. He points out that during the Blip, the borders became blurred and people were “welcomed into countries that have kept them out using barbed wire.” People had enough jobs and houses. “It was not just one community coming together. It was the entire world coming together.” However after the Blip was reversed by the Avengers in *Infinity War*, all those who disappeared came back, and things went back to the way they were before the blip. Bucky retaliates by saying that it still does not justify her means.

Karli and her group of Super-Soldiers attack the GRC depots to steal resources for those in need. Furthermore, while doing so, she does not hesitate to kill those who stop her. In one such raid, an injured soldier swears at her, and replies: "you had six months worth of supplies, just sat there in that building. Don't you understand, we are fighting for our lives" (Episode 3). Later, Sam meets Karli personally to reason with her. He tells her that Zemo called her a supremacist. Shocked at such a statement, she responds, "Everything I do is to end supremacy. These corporations and the beasts who run them, they are the supremacists" (Episode 4). Though Karli's means are wrong, the question is ‘what pushed her to take such drastic measures?’

The Flag Smashers wish to disrupt the GRC meeting and force them to pay heed to the problems faced by the masses. The meeting is to vote for the "Patch Act". An Act which would move millions of refugees to their country of origin. This Act would, thus, affect international politics. During this meeting, representatives of various nationalities meet, one being the Senator from New York. While the representatives argue about insufficient resources at the resettlement camps and the optics of it all, the Senator comments: "the optics are whatever we show them." He continues a little later, "Do we need to bother with a vote? There are troops in place. I can make a call and have the refugees move now" (Episode 5). This is a classic example of Post-truth rhetoric. This attitude of the Senator is what Karli and her team are fighting against. One of the reasons the Senator behaves in such a manner is that he might not realise how a decision like this could affect the people worldwide.

Karli successfully disrupts the meeting, but the members are saved only to hold their decisions stronger. After their lives are saved, the members wish to resume the meeting and go ahead with resettlement. Sam questions them about this, and the Senators rationalises their decision by saying it is too complicated for others to understand. The members also refer to the Flag Smashers as terrorists. Sam counter-questions, "Your peacekeeping troops carrying weapons are forcing millions of people into settlements around the world. What do you think those people are going to call you?" (Episode 6). Is it then ok to assume that these authorities are unaware of the consequences, or do these consequences not bother them? The

second seems more likely because the Senator, during the meeting, also says, "The right people will go along with this, they always do" (Episode 5).

Sam reasons with them. He says that people support the Flag Smashers and their cause because they thought she was right. Moreover, even though one Karli was silenced, there will surely be more. He reminds them: "You control the banks...you can move borders! You can knock down a forest with an email; you can feed a million people with a phone call. However, the question is, who is in the room when you are making those decisions? Is it the people you are going to impact? or is it just more people like you?" What the people want is to be heard and their problems to be taken into consideration. If the authorities make all the decisions, *who* are finally benefitted? *Who* is manipulated into thinking that all this is for the greater good?

### **Connotative Level**

When we look at the scene where Sam and Bucky are seen talking to Isaiah, the scene reveals his hardships due to his skin colour. The dialogue by the Senator at the Global Repatriation Council shows his hope in building a new world; however limited his notion of it may be. The following scene analysed in this research is of despair, wherein Sam and his sister's appeal for a loan gets rejected. When Karli talks about a new world, her idea is of "One world. One People." The tagline with which they work symbolises hope, though their means of achieving that dream involved violence. When the Senator tries to ascertain his decision without caring how it would affect the people worldwide, the series again depicts a scene of despair. The despair is for the people who were working for the idea of 'one world, one people'. All this despair is countered in the following scene, which shows hope. Sam enlightens the council members and the world, through the media present at the scene, about the intention behind Karli and the Flag Smashers' actions.

A pattern emerges though none of the scenes are repeated. The scenes acquire their similarity through the messages and emotions they convey. In other words, the scenes are similar at the connotative level than at the denotative. The scenes were not selected based on any patterns, except that they all reflected on the 'post-truth' phenomenon. They appear in chronological order in the series. The emotions conveyed by the scenes are thus despair followed by hope, followed by despair, and then hope again. Considering Mertz's idea of bracket syntagm, which depicts specific aspects of a phenomenon, we can see that the scenes mentioned above form such a syntagm. The scenes bring forward the aspects of hope and despair. However, what is noteworthy here is that despair and hope are from the viewpoint of the masses. This includes Karli, Sam, and all the others who supported her. The selected scenes intending to look at what message they convey, thus, also becomes a representation of the emotions faced by certain characters. On the denotative level, these characters put forward the idea of post-truth through dialogues. The emotions they are entitled to are highlighted at the connotative level.

### **Conclusion**

Post-Truth is a phenomenon coined in 1992 and has been worked upon in academia since, though it gained much attention worldwide only in recent years. The main arguments



revolve around the declining morality in the world of politics. *The Falcon and The Winter Soldier* was not the first attempt by Marvel to showcase this phenomenon. Another Marvel series, *Agent Carter* (2015), explicitly highlights how a particular group of authorities manipulate the truth and act as king-makers from the shadows. Such popular fiction and shows create awareness amongst the audience about the ill-effects of political engineering based on limited knowledge, or emotions partial towards a particular group of people. It also highlights the importance of the "other side" of the story, which is usually suppressed. The Semiological analysis helps us decode what the scenes intended to convey at both denotative and connotative level. The idea of post-truth was visible explicitly throughout the dialogues of the scenes analysed. The quest for a new truth in a new world requires a series of emotional fluxes, which was seen at the connotative level. However, what stands essential is that there is a patterned loop of hope following despair. Literature and media become vehicles that carry post-truth into a new era, with each medium contributing to their parts.

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## AN INTERVIEW WITH POET-SCHOLAR, PROF. KUL BUSHAN RAZDAN



*Professor (Dr) Kul Bushan Razdan is former Head, Department of English and Dean, Faculty of Arts, University of Jammu. [UT, J&K]. His Areas of Specialization/Interest are 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century American Novel/ Poetry/ Drama, Literary Theory/ Literary Criticism, Translation and Translation Theory and Comparative Literature. Prof. Razdan has supervised over a dozen Ph.D and M.Phil scholars and published eighty research articles. His academic pursuits are writing English Poetry and reading Classical Literature.*

*Dr. Ravinder Singh, Assistant Professor, Dept. of English, University of Jammu recently interacted with Prof. Razdan at his residence in Jammu to know about his evolution as poet and scholar of eminence.*

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**RS:** *Prof. K.B. Razdan. I have been reading your poems in leading Newspapers/magazines. Your poetry is a rich compendium of imaginative takes on contemporary issues assailing humanity at global and local levels. I have always harboured a desire to probe into the creative dynamics that inform your writings and to know the inspirational factors that triggered your forays into the unfathomable ocean of creativity?*

**KBR:** Well, right from my student days, I had a fascination for poetry. I would read poems from my father's books, particularly the poets like Tennyson attracted me the most, even though I could not understand them completely. I had, you can say, the spark and the proclivity towards writing poetry.

**RS:** *When did you actually start writing poetry?*

**KBR:** As I said earlier, I had a natural penchant for poetry, I started writing soon after I became a lecturer in a college. I would scribble lines on notebooks. One can't call

those lines as poems or poetry, but that crude and hesitant attempts at writing poetry was from where I took off.

**RS:** *How was the transition from inchoate 'scribbling lines on notebooks' to serious publishable poetry?*

**KBR:** That was more than a decade back, I must say, right at the first decade of the present century or the close of the last century, 1998, to be precise.

**RS:** *It is quite an interesting odyssey of poetry. May I know which particular form of poetry has dominated your verses?*

**KBR:** Well it was again as a post graduate student of English in the Jammu and Kashmir University that I got fascinated to Greek Mythology. It fascinated me so much so that I read Ovid, Homer, Virgil etc. and these great writers influenced me to write poems on Achilles, Hector, Aeneas, Priam and others. Can you believe Dr. Ravinder Singh, during my early years of teaching Post-Graduate students in the University of Kashmir in early 1980's, I got fascinated by the myth of Sisyphus. You know that Sisyphus is a Titan and Zeus got angered and made him roll a boulder to the top of a hill. The moment Sisyphus took it to the top, the boulder would roll down again. So, Sisyphus was engaged in a very futile and absurd task and it struck me to write a poem on Sisyphus:

Sisyphus, go on rolling the boulder,  
Don't give in,  
Face Zeus with determination till  
A Terrible tremor flattens the slope,  
And you are relieved.

**RS:** *That's great. It speaks volumes about your erudition as well as inspiration from the Greek mythology. But my question remains unanswered. Please tell me as to which form of verse/strain remains dominant in your poetry?*

**KBR:** I would say that even in romantic or philosophical strain, my fascination remains with Greek mythology. For instance, when I read the myth of Judgement of Paris, I wrote a dramatic poem on Hera, Juno, Aphrodite and their dispute on the Mount Olympus as to which one of them is beautiful. Also, as you know, before I close my answer, that Orpheus was a great musician who would play on his flute, like Lord Krishna, was in love with a nymph called Eurydice. When Eurydice died, Orpheus was terribly grief stricken. Somebody told Orpheus to go to Hades, and nothing moves the King of Hades called Pluto. Nothing moves him, but if you play your flute to Pluto and succeed in making Pluto happy, he might return Eurydice to you. So, Orpheus goes to Hades, plays his flute and Pluto is moved to tears. Pluto tells Orpheus, "Ok, take back Eurydice, but till you cross the gate of the Hades, don't look back. She'll be following you." Orpheus was so much in love with Eurydice, he thought that Pluto would play a trick on him. So, to check, he looked back from the

gate of Hades to see if Eurydice was following him, but the moment he looked back, she was taken away from him forever. He leaves Hades in a state of devastation and grief, angry with himself that he looked back and lost his beloved Eurydice. He became mad and in the state of madness, he was caught by Maenads, the drunken followers of Bacchus, the god of wine. Orpheus was killed, cut into pieces and the pieces were thrown into the sea. That's the origin of the imagery of 'sparagmos' which means, cutting a dead body into pieces. Inspired by this mythical story, I wrote two poems, one titled "Orpheus in Hades" and a sequel "Sparagmos." Both of them are already published.

**RS:** *Very interesting. My next question is when you write a poem, is it a spontaneous surge or every poem becomes an end product of a pre-mediated plan?*

**KBR:** I will answer this question in very specific words. For me, no poem is pre-mediated. It is an organic thing. When I decide to write a poem, I pick up the pen and write it. It flows spontaneously and automatically, something that Robert Frost would do. No poem that I have written has ever been pre-planned or pre-mediated. When I pick up the pen and start writing, one line flows into the other. Its growth is organic like the growth of a tree.

**RS:** *Most of your poems reflect your profound grounding in mythologies and are punctuated with expressions/vocabulary beyond the comprehension of an ordinary reader. Does it mean that Prof. Razdan is poet of the elite, erudite readers?*

**KBR:** No, not at all. This is a common complaint with my friends, readers and students saying that the vocabulary in my poems is difficult and goes above their heads. Even with intellectuals, academics, who are writers themselves often say, Professor Razdan your poems are very difficult. But the question is that, believe me, it was very difficult for me to write in a very simple style. I don't know, when I start writing, some way or the other, an image from Greek Mythology, Scandinavian mythology or from King Arthur and the Round Table come alive. You can say, that way, my creative mind is stuck in medieval times or Homeric times. So, writing in this style, that may be called difficult, comes natural to me.

**RS:** *Sir, on the contrary, the poems written in the recent past are couched in simple language and comprehensible style. Does it connote that you have worked out a shift in the modicum of simplicity?*

**KBR:** (laughs) You mean a paradigmatic shift in my style and vocabulary? It is the persistent complaints from my friends, particularly who are senior academics, I have decided to strike a truce with impertinence (laughs). I started writing in simple writing.

**RS:** *Should this shift in the writing style be regarded as the poet's earnest wish to reach larger audience?*

**KBR:** Yes, true. I do agree. The question is very relevant. I decided that I should make an honest and earnest attempt at writing simple poetry, something that even non-academic readers and friends can also understand.

**RS:** *Linked to this is my desire to know of your immediate plans to render your verses accessible to lovers of poetry?*

**KBR:** Well, my immediate plans, in this context, are I am thinking I would write poems that are far simpler in vocabulary. Rather, I have already written some such poems, so much so that I have decided to write on very common subjects and themes which people read in newspapers and avoid such allusions to Greek or other classical mythologies. And in this context, I must tell you, I have written two poems one is “Mohan’s Radhe in Dwarika” and “““Radhe Mohan, Mohan Radhe.””

**RS:** *Another discernible shift from Homeric world to Indian mythology?*

**KBR:** Yes, because I have read *Mahabharata, Ramayana*; I have read even some of the *Upanishads*. I have read Annie Besant and Bhagwan Das. These are some of the many books my father used to read. *Shrimad Bhagwat Gita* is the book that I have read many times, and I am a devotee of Lord Krishna. This is how poems like “Radhe Mohan, Mohan Radhe” are inspired. This poem is particularly written on a subject which touches the heart of everybody who reads it.

**RS:** *Sir, do you envisage any transitional shift in creative writing, i.e., from poetry to fiction, non-fiction or story writing?*

**KBR:** Well, Dr. Ravinder, I am sure, given the time and inclination, I will be writing short stories very soon. May be, writing a few short stories will be a stepping stone to writing a novel.

**RS:** *Thank you Sir, for being so open and candid about your creative journey so far, dynamics of imaginative writings as well as future plans. Thanks once again.*

**KBR:** Thank you Dr Ravinder. God bless you.

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## Four specimens of Prof. Kul Bushan Razdan's Verse writing

### *A Spectacle of Torture : A Monument of Folly*

By the waters of the Ganges,  
I sat down and mused.  
A deluge of tears welled-up in my eyes,  
A litany of sighs, my mind do throng,  
Holy Ganga, flow softly and slowly, till I end my song.  
Oh, my Divine Mother, Ganga, emanating out of Shiva's locks,  
How come, this demonic desecration of thy sanctity, thy Divinity ?  
A horrifying spectacle transfixed me in horror,  
as I behold corpses of Pandemic victims, adrift thy waves !  
The rattling bones, the stinking stones stalking the banks !  
The Gorgon Virus victims sully thy sanctity, thy Divinity.

O, Almighty, what do I behold ?  
A nightmare ? A horrorscape ?  
Nude dead-bodies immersed in the wet sand on the banks, waiting for burial

To be decimated, not cremated.  
As cremation grounds spill-over with burning pyres !  
What worse Tribulation, what greater Apostasy,  
can these eyes of mine, ever behold ?  
How hideous, how brutal can humans become, resorting to a Faustian  
Travesty, a real shame.  
Corpses thrown into rivers, an Instrument of Torture, a Monument of Folly,  
the Hell man creates on Earth as humans proliferate the Pandemic, axiomatic  
of "Fools rush in where Angels fear to tread."

Bodies of Corona-Covid victims, heaped in sacks,  
A veritable image of Sparagamos, stalks the mind !  
On the wet sandy- shores of Ganga-Maiyya,  
Sudden surges of grief, of melancholy inundate my mind, my psyche !  
A grizzly rodent straddles across the sand,  
Ostensibly, looking for the stinking Pandemic corpses !

### *Love's Rainbow Shower.*

The Rainbow after the shower,  
Seven colours to adorn it !  
My Love is a myriad- coloured Rainbow, my ardour the fever of my Love !

An overcast sky,  
 An overcast mind , infuses the psyche's grind.  
 Oh, no, my Love, the fulcrum of my Being,  
 Knows no Boundaries.  
 It showers upon me,  
 A cloudburst of my emotions, that vibrate the chords,  
 the chords of my Soul !  
 As the Melody of my Love,  
 Ignites my Mindscape, akin to Aeolus' Harp, Zeus' Thunderbolt,  
 making these mere Apologies!  
 She alone knows it,  
 understands it, wraps it with an Effusion of Encapsulating Kisses !

### *Ode On Teacher's Day*

Late, Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan,  
 the former Philosopher President of India,  
 personified in himself, the innate essence of being a teacher, infallible, par—  
 excellence!  
 Genius, Grandeur, Greatness, combined in him, as a Pyramid,  
 to germinate perfect Sublimity of Oratorical Wizardry !  
 As a Professor of Philosophy, Ethics, Ancient Indian and Western Classics,  
 at Banaras Hindu University,  
 He forged an innate rapport with his pupils,  
 reverberating their minds and hearts, with the Melody of his stunning  
 unfathomable vocabulary!

Today, on his Birthday, let the Community of Teachers,  
 consecrate themselves to a flawless profession, sans any regression!  
 Radhakrishnan, in himself, germinated an amalgam of Plato, Horace, and  
 Longinus,  
 lighting Candles of Erudition, Emancipation, Endurance, to dispel darkness  
 of ignorance, and brighten the minds and psyches of his dotting pupils !

What could be a greater tribute, to this Wizard of Erudition, than to forge a  
 tryst within ourselves,  
 a tryst to blend our Oratorical Skills, with a sprinkling of Aristophenes,  
 Homer, Virgil, and Ovid!  
 May this Intellectual Spice, take a draught of Halcyonic Bubbles !  
 As a befitting homage to one, whose intellect the gods embellished with  
 Sibyll's Leaves !

**"Juliet On The Balcony : A Postmodernist Rendition, In the Dramatic Mode"**

*(Juliet is standing in the Balcony of her house, when she suddenly espies Romeo, down in the street astride a horse )*

**Juliet:** Hey, Romeo, art thou gone mad, vagabonding across the street like a Highwayman? Prithee, the Corona Virus surrounds thee all-around. How canst thou be so befuddled by thy laxity?

**Romeo:** Thou art the culprit, as thy love hast vanquished all my wisdom, my logic, rendering me as a hollow husk, inundated by thy love's deluge. Let, the virus vanquish me, I care. a tuppence.

**Juliet:** Zounds, art thee hosting the Devil, rendering thee a husk, bereft of any wisdom, draining my love for thee like a drying river-bed. I beseech thee, for my love's sake, take care of thyself as thou art my love, my very essence, my being ! Romeo : Fear not my love, do waft me a kiss, our love shall conquer all evil viruses, love has been and continues to be all-vanquishing.

**Juliet** Oh, my love, how canst I waft thee a kiss, and allow the evil Virus to endanger thy life? And, prithee, thou art sans a mask, nor can I discern the aroma of a protective sanitizer embellishing thy arms, thy hands. No, no, no kisses, no embraces, only distances.

**Romeo:** Care I not, every passing day, I pine for thee, I beseech thee to drown my Being with thy love's deluge.

**Juliet:** Prithee, thou know Love is blind, and lovers commit follies, they themselves cannot see. I again, beseech thee to retreat to thy place, and keep thyself in home-isolation, as thou art my very Being, my very essence, O my Honeyed Romeo, keep thyself safe, stay at thy home.

**Romeo:** My love, my Home is thy Heart, stay there I safe, ever and ever. Juliet : Know I well all thy feelings, thy boundless love for me, yet do I fear the sanctity of thy health may get invaded by the invisible Covid monster. I beseech thee to leave the street, and protect thyself.

**Romeo:** In thee I have been, since the birth of time like heartbeats to the heart, come down to the street, give me a deep, deep kiss, an encapsulating embrace !

**Juliet:** No, no won't do all what thou sayeth, can't imperil my Love's life !

**Romeo:** O, Lord, my Love's Love transcends all temptations, all inducements and entreaties, what canst I do now ! Let me entreat her in some other way.



**Juliet:** O Romeo, thou art astride a horse, I'll unknot my long hair to reach thee, as Hero did with Leander, play with thy Love's hair, and satiate thyself with the aroma of my all-engulfing Love, for thee ! She unties her long wavy hair, as the locks reach Romeo. He kisses the lovely aromatic hair, weaves it across his heart, and addresses Juliet)

**Romeo:** O, my Love, the intoxication of thy aroma, hast encapsulated my very heart, my soul. Now, erst I depart, kiss me in thy mind, clasp me round thy heart, till filled with thee am I, as the cocoon is with the butterfly !

**Juliet:** So, shall it be, O, my Love, let Corona consume all rascallions, wastrels, enemies of Love across all times !

*(Juliet goes inside her mansion, fixing her longing gaze on Romeo, till he gallops away out of sight, down the street.)*

**Sherry Turkle (Ed.) *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With***

Publisher: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, London. 2011: First MIT Paperback Edition, pp. 385

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“We think with the objects we love; we love the objects we think with.”

My cellphone developing some snag and being sent to the service centre one fine morning for repairs, was not something earth shattering but it did change my life for a couple of days and also made me understand how I relate to it. While initially I felt good that for two days. I thought I won't be instinctively rushing to grab my phone to see the WhatsApp and text messages, to check the email inbox, or to connect with the Facebook friends. I thought the absence of the cellphone would bring some calm to the mind always running here and there. In short, I wanted to enjoy my solitude which I always thought had been snatched away by the demands the cellphone laid on my psyche, the demands which are the imperatives of living in a network society. I felt relieved that I was rid of the irritating, unnecessary interference of ringtones or vibrations even in those moments when I wanted to be alone to be one with my own self.

However, by the evening I was feeling as if something very important was missing from my life. I became aware of my dependence on it for performing multiple tasks every day. The cellphone is no more a device just for making or receiving phone calls or for exchanging text messages. It is almost like a prosthetic device without which I felt I was incomplete. I realized that more than anything else, my cellphone was an extension of my memory, though not a tribute to my unfailing memory, but as a mnemonic device, a testimony to my fallible memory. When we had landline phones, we remembered all the phone numbers, hundreds of them, by heart. But the cellphone has made such an exercise totally redundant. A cellphone is a voice recorder, a still camera, a video camera, a notepad, an entire mall to purchase things big and small! In a way, it is like having your world in your palm.

I realized very acutely how my relationship with my cellphone was marked by ambivalent feelings traversing the whole spectrum of hate and love. I was missing an object I wanted to get rid of. Is this how we relate to the objects? Is it not a relationship that is similar to our relations with other human beings in our life, especially the significant others? Is the I-

Thou relationship, as Martin Buber theorizes in his *I and Thou*, radically different from I-It relationship? With the objects that we use capable of evoking emotions, memories and thoughts in us, and then assuming a life of their own as if they are sentient beings like us, are we not looking at the imbrication of the human and the non-human, of the Thou and the It? I believe we need to understand our relationship with the objects we use today in a better way, especially given the fact that most of such objects become extensions of our own bodies and define our identities.

It is in this context that this anthology of thirty-four essays entitled *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With* edited by Sherry Turkle, the Abby Rockefeller Mauzé Professor of the Social Studies of Science and Technology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, assumes great importance. The thirty-four essays authored by scientists, artists, designers, anthropologists and humanists trace the power of everyday objects such as ballet slippers, keyboards, anti-depressant pills, cello, glucometer, rolling pin, Polaroid instant camera, radio, datebook, raincoat and the like.

It is an engrossing text. The way it is structured, it presents an interface of material objects, personal reflection, subjectivity and theory. Each essay is preceded by an epigraph reflecting on various aspects of objects. These epigraphs are from classics of theory and philosophy – Lacan, Derrida, Mauss, Karl Marx, Baudrillard, Vygotsky, Jean Piaget, Levi-Strauss, Winnicott, Lewis Mumford and Bruno Latour among others. “As theory,” writes Turkle, “defamiliarizes objects, objects familiarize theory” (307).

All the essays in the text are grouped under six subheads: Objects of Design and Play, Objects of Discipline and Desire, Objects of History and Exchange, Objects of Transition and Passage, Objects of Mourning and Memory, and Objects of Meditation and New Vision. In her Introduction “The Things That Matter,” Turkle suggests that “We find it familiar to consider objects as useful or aesthetic, as necessities or vain indulgences. We are on less familiar ground when we consider objects as companions to our emotional lives or as provocations to thought. The notion of evocative objects brings together these two less familiar ideas, underscoring the inseparability of thought and feeling in our relationship to things. We think with the objects we love; we love the objects we think with” (5). The most familiar objects become points of departure in these essays. They become portals to flights of imagination. They evoke ideas that crystallize in language, perhaps the slipperiest thing known to us. The words lead to words, recover the buried, hidden past, many fears as well, and the objects do not remain mere objects, they take on, as it were, a life of their own and define the author, and become his/her identity.

The diabetic author Joseph Cevetello’s glucometer, the first object he sees every morning is not just his companion, for he declares: “It has become me. Our interactions define my sense of who I am” (64). The glucometer, he confesses, “maintains my image of myself as a man able to take care of himself. It also defines me as a diseased person, one who needs the aid of objects to sustain my life. The meter concretizes my commitment to remaining healthy and communicates to others that I am different, somehow incomplete” (67). What the meter output tells him determines his actions.

His interactions with his meter make him realize how the relationships between people and medical machinery are evolving. These relationships are so vital that they are intrinsic to human life. He looks upon his relationship with his meter as a nascent stage of cyborgian relationship. He ruminates: “The Austrian poet, Rainer Maria Rilke, said: “The future enters into us, in order to be transformed in us long before it happens” (68). Projecting into the future, he imagines: “I live in a world of ubiquitous, body-based, clothing-based computing, but in this future, a small implantable device regulates my glucose levels and insulin needs. It operates autonomously . . . I do not control my disease; my computer pancreas controls it for me . . . it is difficult for me to remember that I have diabetes” (67).

For neurobiologist Matthew Belmonte, his glaringly bright yellow raincoat not only protected him from rain when he was a child, it also represented his “fear of letting anything in — people most of all.” (72). Despite the raincoat being his armour against death and chaos, it invokes highly ambivalent feelings in his mind. The raincoat serves as an interface of his relationship with his mother also. In a situation reminiscent of R.D. Laing’s views on I-It relationship, the raincoat arouses deep ontological insecurity in Belmonte: “Wrapped around and covering me, the raincoat represented my mother’s triumph over my own will, and persistently reminded me of my dependence on her. In a fundamental way that I didn’t consciously acknowledge, the coat came to represent my mother, and I loved and resented it as I loved and resented her. A fear of death, of being smothered and negated, drives us to separate ourselves from our parents. And a fear of life, of being responsible for ourselves in an indifferent world, brings us back to seek their protection. These conflicting denials of death and of life were attached to the coat: “it made me impermeable to the assaults of the outside world, yet it defined me in a way that prevented me from being myself” (72-743). Belmonte’s own ambivalence gives him a deeper understanding of how the minds of autistic people function.

Contrary to Belmonte’s insecurity which is triggered by the presence of his raincoat, it is the loss of Michelle Hlubinka’s datebook that undermines her ontological security. Her datebook was her “external information organ” (80) and when it was lost, she “felt as though I had lost my life” (80). Her notebook had enabled her to “weave a matrix of possibility” as she would often note “three concurrent events that sounded equally enticing, and at the last minute my whims would direct me to one of them or to cross them all off my list” (79). Her datebook was her organizer; she thought that she had the organizer but it was actually the organizer which had her and naturally she felt disorganized on losing it. The digital diary which replaced her notebook leaves her feeling ‘destabilized,’ since the digital record doesn’t leave traces of choices made and options erased and hence deprives her of weaving her matrix of possibility. She imagines that her lost notebook provided a direct access to the kind of person she is: “I imagine my runaway, tattered paper pages wandering around Cambridge, Massachusetts, being picked up by strangers who try to decipher who I might be, perhaps attending some of the events I had noted for April and May and looking around for me, the curious owner” (83-84).

Looking at her blue-coloured, anti-depressant pill Ludiomil, Gail Wight not only waxes poetic about its sheer aesthetic beauty, she also philosophizes about therapy and the causes of her depression. She likes her “drugs colorful, aesthetically inspiring, exhilarating the imagination through the sheer force of their physical beauty” and thinks that her “little

Ludimil *is* beautiful, a pale blue speck of sky. It's sweet and tiny and powder pastel, not so devoid of aesthetic pleasures after all. It reminds me that the pink and blue of infant codification was reversed in Victorian times, pink being for boys and blue for girls. This gives me a fierce feeling of ownership for my blue dot, a feminist protectorate. It helped me escape from whatever might have spawned my depression: "a hereditary noose, an intractable post-partum guest, a late capitalist malaise in a post-punk dress code" (95-96).

An object symbolic of transition and passage and a mobile metonym for a wider world (147), the Melbourne train not only carries William J. Mitchell from one place to another, it also takes him to a new identity. Occupying the liminal space in the train Mitchell brings books, words and objects within his expanding sense of self: "It was on a train, long before I was reluctantly dragged off to school, that I first realized I could read. With my nose up against the window, I began to decipher the signs advertising Bushell's Tea, the mileage markers that crept by, and the names of the stations where we creaked to successive stops — words in memorable sequence, the beginnings of narrative" (148). The physical form and movement of the train spawns a meditation on language:

When I was learning to write schoolboy essays of my own, perched at a wooden desk with porcelain inkwell and steel-nibbed pen, I often thought of sentences as trains. You could shunt the words around, like rolling stock on a siding, until you got them in exactly the right order. Like empty boxcars, they could carry the freight of simile and metaphor. And verbs, surely, were locomotives. Put them up front for snappy imperatives. Multiply, mass, and combine them for extra power. Keep it short. On the other hand, if the mood took you, and you wanted to construct a long, slow, freight-train of a sentence, with reflective asides . . . you could just let a few scattered verbs help it along from somewhere in the middle. Or, for a different effect, they might follow, pushing. When I memorized and recited poetry from the *School Reader*—mostly jingling ballads . . . the rhythms of the rails were always on my mind.

Mitchell left long ago the bush country where he was born. But even now the sight of the express train "recovers the memory of a spreading, aromatic peppercorn tree, a corrugated iron roof that was too hot to touch when you climbed up to retrieve a ball, the sudden smell of raindrops in the dust, and a small, curious child—walking with his impossibly young and beautiful parents along a silent, sunburned street" (150).

The rolling pin of Susan Pollak's grandmother evokes more than nostalgia in her; it makes her meditate on loss. Her grandmother was the anchor of her life, "mediating between an absent, depressed father and an irrational, erratic mother" (226). The object becomes timeless as she uses to make cookie dough with it: "As I use her rolling pin and feel its texture and weight against my floured hands, I think of the hundreds of pies and cookies it helped create. It anchors me in the past, yet continues to create memories for the future. The object becomes timeless" (227). The essay demonstrates how the materiality of an object makes a tangible link to the past and to the loved ones who are no longer with us. The rolling pin is an object of mourning with healing potential too.

This is how all the essays in *Evocative Objects* bring together a series of some times intimate, and on other occasions, detached reflections on how the lives of people and things interweave. The attempted intersection of material culture, technology, everyday life, feelings, thought and language, and subjectivity astounds and delights. The essays explore how we relate to the inanimate and the animate. These encounters shape the self. In another essay on vacuum cleaner, Nathan Greenslit writes: “Our psyche reveals its structure when the everyday wobbles, when what we’ve always taken for granted slips out of place and suddenly appears strange” (141). This process of defamiliarizing and estranging the familiar and the taken-for-granted is what this rather unusually structured book attempts to achieve. The objects take on enchanted significances and challenge the comfortable boundaries between the “born and created and between humans and everything else” (326).

The literary essay as a genre has a very rich tradition starting with Bacon, Addison, Steele Lamb and others. These rather idiosyncratic essays which catalyze ordinary objects into existence, objects that “traffic between the outside and the inner self” seem to me not only to enrich that tradition but open up new paradigms for this literary genre that blurs the distinction between theory, literature, philosophy, psychology and metalinguistic concerns that inform most of literary theory in its postmodernist *avatars*. This is a text not only about evocative objects, it is text that moves us to a better and deeper understanding of our relationship with the objects we use.

Of Prayers and Poster Poems

Reviewing Lalit Mohan Sharma's *Eyes of Silence*.  
The Poetry Society of India, Gurugram (India), 2020, pp. 138, Rs. 390.

**Prof. Harish Narang**

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As a writer of fiction-a discursive discourse-I have always held poets and their craft in awe. The way they squeeze complex experiences and thoughts into compact, pithy memorable phrases and lines, bringing in symbols and metaphors that glide smoothly across cultures and languages, becoming universals in the process is something that has always amazed me and I remain a mesmerized reader of poetry from Nanak to Neruda, Kabir to Ken Saro Wiwa and from Lorca to Lalit Sharma. Unlike those who, admire poetry- or the entire *oeuvre* of literature for that matter-created for its own sake, full of sound and signifying nothing, I have a penchant for poetry with a purpose. A poet- or any other artist- must have a message, covert or overt, and should deal with-among others- what Chinua Achebe called 'burning issues of the day.'

It is for these reasons- and some more- that I am an ardent admirer of the poetry of Lalit Mohan Sharma- a well known contemporary poet from India who writes both in English and Hindi- whose latest collection of poems –*Eyes of Silence*(The Poetry Society of India, Gurugram, 2020)-I propose to discuss below. But before that, a few words about the poet: Lalit Mohan Sharma, who has been a teacher of Literature, has been writing poetry for nearly forty years and has multiple collections of poems written in English. I said 'in English' because he began as a poet writing in Hindi way back in the 70s of the last century. Besides being a poet, Lalit Mohan Sharma is also a translator of poetry, having rendered Zahid Abrol's poems into English from Urdu.

What I like-first- about this latest collection-*Eyes of Silence*- is the ranges of its subjects: from Gandhi to Grenoble, from Ram to Rhetoric and from Prayers to Poster Poems. Here are some excerpts from some that are my favourites:

'Godsey, Gandhi and Grandfather' is what I like the most of several Gandhi poems by Lalit Sharma in this collection-

When Jawahar Lal Nehru made  
The tryst with destiny speech

And Gandhi walked barefoot  
 The streets of Noakhali  
 I don't know at all  
 What was Godsey doing

Godsey and Gandhi have been juxtaposed traditionally in myriad discourses, Lalit Sharma disrupts that duality by wedging Grandfather in between-his own grandfather who was known as Doaba Gandhi but was ironically jailed for being associated with Godsey related 'activities' for helping the migrants with 'refuge and succour' from Pakistan during the partition. This is a poetic rendering of event- of national import as much of family history- in as straight a narration as can be made.

Another of my favourites is 'It Won't Get Worse' wherein he speaks of love from Gandhi who preached 'Love another just like/yourself you do love' to myriads of ordinary lover couples:

Not just for each other  
 Yearn the lovers  
 Their love a protest  
 a rebellion soften  
 It's the stuff common  
 To many a love legend  
 Lovers move across  
 Enmity of generations  
 Lands across the oceans  
 Celebrates tales of love

Rama has dominated the landscape of national discourse-primarily political- for the last so many decades. Here is Lalit sharma's take on Rama ('Re-visioning Rama'):

The word Rama conjures up visions  
 Of a life lived at home and in towns  
 The nine-day festival of the three  
 Two brothers and a woman  
 Walk through city lanes  
 And of late-night open theatre  
 telling tales known to everyone  
 be it man woman or the child

Takes you back to the days of *Ramlila* in small townships and villages and the simple pleasures of amateur theatre with, at times, ramshackled cast rather than the political war cry of 'Ram lalaa hum aayenge, mandir wahin banayenge.'

Like the air you breathe the water  
 You drink that one word on the lips  
 Greets another on the streets





The versus virus is galvanized  
Doors open on perilous streets  
Excited faces beam at windows  
Gathering crowds annul the choice  
To raise a voice in mild dissent( *At This Juncture*)

. . .

The word 'only' is unnecessary  
That is what I said in a hurry  
To wind up the argument  
If at all it is now strictly  
A word political as I'm told  
What to eat or how to dress  
Which words to utter When a flag is hoisted  
Or a slogan is raised  
When the name of a man .  
Appears on the hoardings  
At the gas station or tv screen  
Every hour of twenty four  
For seven days of a week (*Poster Poem*)

A significant feast awaits all those who choose to read *Eyes of Silence*

*Manottama: Narrative of a Sorrowful Wife*; Anonymous: Hindukula Kamini Pranito, (a Woman belonging to Hindu Lineage); Translated and Introduced by Somdatta Mandal. Delhi & Kolkata: Shambhabi; 2021; pp. 72; Rs 300/-

**Dr. Purabi Panwar**

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*Manottama* was published in colonial Calcutta in 1868, the first Bengali novel written anonymously by a woman. These were the times when young girls were married off when they were about nine and had not yet reached puberty, to boys not over sixteen. The *kulin* society allowed men to marry more than once but of course women, even if they were child widows, could not even dream of it. Education was taboo for women and some even believed that reading would cause a woman to become a widow.

*Manottama* lived in these times and her father had educated her. She was a sweet natured person, not in the least bit self-conscious about her education or skills in handling household chores. However, she was married off to Nilabrata, an uneducated, uncouth man, full of bad habits, who treated her very badly, but she put up with everything, even him marrying a second time. The modern reader might find it a bit too much to stomach, but there is a parable like quality in the novel which makes him/ her continue. Both the wives have sons, but of course the husband celebrates the *annaprasana* or rice eating ceremony of the second wife's son lavishly, ignoring the first wife's son. She of course loves both her biological son and stepson equally fondly.

The first section of the novel ends abruptly after *Manottama*'s father's visit asking her to spend some time with him in his house and *Manottama* flatly refuses to do so because she believes that a wife's place is always next to her husband, whatever the circumstances might be. She even gives examples of several wives from various epic and Indian texts justifying her decision. Unfortunately, the second section is not available. A brief look at the narrative shows that it is not a great work of literature. Its' worth lies in the time of its publication. It was a time when very few women were educated, let alone write about it. A friend who is an eminent literary critic, suggested that probably the novel was actually written by a man who pretended to be a woman, but that does not seem likely. The details of the women's room (the *antahpur*) and the birth room (the *atur ghar*), especially the latter, indicates familiarity which only a woman could experience..

What gives the novel a significant place in the history of women's fiction writing in India is its time of publication. At a time when few women were educated, this Bengali writer who chose to remain anonymous, wrote about another woman who suffered at the hands of an uneducated, ill-bred husband, just because she was educated and genteel. Not only did the author write the first section of the novel, she got it published, something that indicates literary ambitions. Before being published in a book form, the novel originally was published serially in several instalments in a new Bengali journal of the time.

Credit goes to Somdatta Mandal for translating and introducing it and getting a substantial Foreword written by the well-known nineteenth century expert Rosinka Chaudhuri who discusses the significance of the rise of the novel form during that period. In her Introduction, Mandal has historicized the text, put it in perspective and then discussed it before presenting it to the reader. She talks about the way in which the text was found in the archives of the British Library in London by Adrish Biswas, a scholar working on nineteenth century literature as late as 2010. Her familiarity with both the source language and the target language, enhances the quality of the translation presenting *Manottama*, and more importantly the times, nineteenth century Bengal where women were expected to get married, do housework, produce children and look after them and their husbands, without the desire to aspire for more. The translated novel also conveys the formal turn of language which was usual in the Bengali novel in those days along with a seriousness of tone in keeping with the plot. It would be a useful text for anyone who wants to study the history of the Bengali novel.

Dr. Shivani Salil. *Hiraeth: Partition Stories from 1947*. ArtoonsInn room9 Publications. Pp. 110. Kindle Edition.

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Dr. Shivani Salil is the author of the phenomenal story collection *Hiraeth: Partition Stories of 1947* that was published in 2019 by ArtoonsInn room9 Publications. The anthology is her debutante work on the subject of India-Pakistan partition. She is a medical doctor by profession and ventured into writing in 2017 as a blog writer. Her collection of twenty-four short stories compile documented history, tales of the lived horror and violent experience and true incidents from the 1947 refugee camps, with a touch of fiction. Salil also brings forth the pain and sufferings of the refugees, the question related to their identity running till today and the intergenerational trauma faced by the children of these survivors.

Even before one starts reading the stories, the book cover emerges as the perfect metaphor for the partition and its after effects. The cover is hand painted by Dr. Pratishtha Banga Chaudhari who belongs to a refugee family herself. The cover shows a tree which has been divided into halves as lightning strikes it suddenly but the roots remain unaffected. The tree represents the pre-partitioned India where different religious communities have coexisted peacefully and the sudden lightening is the haphazard line created by the political elites thus dividing the unified nation into India and Pakistan. One can also spot two sad faces looking at each other; these faces represent the emotional response of the people of India and Pakistan in the wake of the 1947 Partition.

Salil also employs a unique manner to arrange her stories which do not run chronologically from the pre-migration to the migration, and into the post-migration phase. Quite interestingly, her stories are named in Urdu, a language which is linguistically and emotionally closest to the region she represents in her stories. In Salil's own words, the stories had a keyword to denote the essence of the tale. Usually a one-worded title, these essences were "emotions" related to the ensuing event. Salil also provides chapter endnotes to help with the cultural translations she did in the middle of the story; except when she breaks into a *shayari* or a poem which is followed with an English translation. It is no coincidence that Salil names her collection *Hiraeth*, a Welsh word, to convey her experience of writing the book, quite aptly; it denoted an intangible feeling which cannot be translated. Thematically, the stories can be broadly divided according to the phases of 1947 Partition. The first is the idea of disbelief and disillusionment. Stories like "Lahore", "Quam (Nation)", "Radcliffe Line" and "Omar" deal with this phase of Partition. It is important to notice that it was mostly the older generation that was not ready to believe in the idea of Partition and the subsequent violence.

The second phase is the pre-migration horror. The change in the country's atmosphere also changed the relationship between people. The families which were earlier

happy neighbors turned into enemies and became hungry for blood. Stories like “Chinh (Mark)”, “Izzat (Honour)” and “Kulfat (Grief)” uncover the horrific violence, followed by sadness and gut-wrenching steps that families took to safeguard them and their honor.

The third phase was the creation of the community of ‘refugees’, *sharanarthis* or *muhajirs*. They were treated as the outsiders and a burden to the society rather than resources or natives and had to depend on the benignity of the state and people around them. Stories like “Saans (Breath)”, “Ummi”, “Yaadein (Memories)”, “Tadbeer (Strategy)”, “Beaaz (Book)”, “Hiraeth (Longing)”, “Jazbaat (Emotions)” deal with the post-partition difficulties and the struggles that refugees had to face with. They were also exposed to all kinds of physical and mental abuse yet this collection brings forth refugee characters and their families who despite living in harsh conditions in India and Pakistani refugee camps fought the odds with resilience.

Apart from these, Salil also narrated those stories that go past the idea of divide and speaks about humanity and kindness that existed even during those times of violence, and it is these stories that make Partition literature a space to dismantle the premise of two nation theory. She portrayed this idea through the characters of Raheem Chaacha, Mansoor Ali and Naved who saved their neighbors by warning them at the right time and helping them negotiate their way out of their lands.

It is the engagement of the third generation with these horrific narratives of trauma that makes this collection a unique one. Although Salil belonged to the family of refugees, her grandparents never shared their stories of grief and pain. The retellings in *Hiraeth* are a testimony that traumatic events are an important part of our psyche and many families actively pass on their traumatic memories to the new generation. Stories like “Vatani (Compatriot)”, “Yaadein (Memories)”, “Waghaar (Tempering)” demonstrate the way the second and third generation have preserved the Partition memories and play an important role in forming their contemporary identity.

Through this attempt to preserve some of the oral histories of the extinct generation, Salil also goes through a metaphorical odyssey of knowing her inherited legacy. Refugees lived with the idea that ‘life goes on’ and this anthology is a tribute to that. Moreover, as she pointed out in one of her interviews that she always wanted to write about Partition especially for the younger audience as she believes that they don’t know much about the Partition, specifically the real experiences and the struggle of their ancestors. The choice of using Urdu words as the title of each chapter and writing certain dialogues in the native language is also an attempt to present the experience of the first generation as authentic as possible. To conclude, the book is worth a read and makes an important contribution in the field of oral history and Partition literature.

## POEMS

**Tapeshwar Prasad**

*To fill the crypt*

How much deep  
I drown my sorrow  
much less remains  
to fill the crypt  
Falling leaves  
occupy the space  
wrinkled and crisp  
drugged by silence, down  
How much more  
I stretch myself  
much that looks me above  
burrow me underground  
to make their nest.

*Gravity of my heart*

I rolled an ocean  
inside a fountain pen  
and wrote nothing  
in spirited low  
I took to the moon  
and,  
started simmering my words  
by the silvery beam of my wishes  
all that was -  
the gravity of my heart.

*Remembrance*

I spill a colour or two  
into the swirling mist  
of dust and forgetfulness;  
before  
it could wreath a rainbow  
over the grave -  
sodden wet  
with your remembrance.

*An array of soft light*

Place my heart, there  
 inside a crater of a far off planet  
 Away from the dingy land  
 of repentance and remembrance;  
 into the seven folds of  
 starry tranquility  
 enveloping the space  
 Softly beating  
 the passing array of soft light  
 from one meadow to the next;  
 away  
 from the ambivalent nature of earthy man.

*Pause*

I pause a second  
 While I walk the pavement  
 of a busy city road  
 I see the traffic  
 Passing by me, this end to that  
 I pause a little more  
 While I take a long breath  
 Standing over the billboard  
 Piercing cyclops  
 through its single eye  
 You mean quixotic  
 of a windmill.  
 I term it, my gaze  
 Working upon my standing  
 Some pause here, some pause there.

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*\* Tapeshwar Prasad has authored five surrealistic and realistic poetry books, and has been featured in Camel Saloon (U.K.), Cordite Poetry Review (Australia), The Aquillrelle Wall of Poetry, Crashing Waves (USA), Scaling Heights (an Anthology on Contemporary Indian English Poetry), and World Anthology of English Poetry. He has been included thrice as ICOP: Roll of Honour (U.K.). Currently he is Graphic Designer at St. Xavier's College of Management & Technology, Digha-Aashiyanna Road, Patna (Bihar)  
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**Alapati. Purnachandra Rao**

*Triumph*

Loathing looks and grinning smiles  
stimulate the indomitable aspirations  
of the broken hearts;  
Like the waxing moon  
in the welkin flashes  
in the form of optimistic wishes  
that dampen the spirits of  
aboriginal dudes unattended;  
Then the eternity of fraternity  
surges in elation  
waving the rising hands  
to lift the suppressed.

The culmination of churning  
passions arrayed;  
paving the way to  
the robust heights unheard;  
Ah! The trumpet of a triumph  
echoes in the four corners of the rim  
When the sovereignty embraces  
the souls of the oppressed.

*Life Sans Art*

A blossom glows with its eyelashes  
When the amorous landscape in warm Sun flashes;  
A bee is content with this blazing green  
And the heart of the Sky is a sapphire in sheen.

A bard peeps amidst blades of grass  
And wounds his nerve to the mark of 'Cross';  
Oh! A massive agony falls on his heart  
As he fails to soar to divine art.

*Beloved's Realm*

The lover is slithering like a wave  
As the tide of love turns back to;  
The prickling passion cleaves the heart-cave

When the wild wind of thoughts crave for a photo;  
The twirling emotion overrides him  
Thus to hug the eternity with a whim;  
A impulse drags him with glum  
When he is yet to grab the beloved's realm.

---

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## **Ariful IslamLaskar**

### *Drawn to Hope*

Broken and twisted?  
Stopped light entering into your soul? -  
And in darkness you are still searching your goal;  
Months after months you have done so.

Having seen a one-legged tiny sparrow  
Walking on the wire and flying over the sky,  
Having witnessed the blind man laughing soulful,  
An autistic child singing so in tune-  
What fear then stops you?

Who force you shut down the windows of soul?  
Who dare to encroach your empire of thoughts?  
Family-you can point your finger  
Society- you can blame  
God- you can make responsible;  
Feel comfortable though  
Thus, your ruinous state will continue.

For decade the inner plague will pursue you  
Till death life-in-death will shroud you  
O! wretched it is you! - you are injuring you  
The demon is you; negative fear paralyses you;  
Don't give it space- comfortably it will eclipse your hope,  
Take a bit of responsibility on your shoulder  
Clad yourself with a garment of courage and then-  
Just take a step, another step, and another dear  
See darling! - you are free, life is on and you are through...

### *The Tale of a Wound*

Have a wound or multiple?  
Hiding carefully, aha-  
Like a graveyard hides a corpse;  
Like a charismatic make-up man  
Like a professional stage actor!  
So cautiously that even after months  
You do not know what it is?  
Did you talk with them daily?

Have you opened them to light?  
Or those are only yours-so private!

So precious that cannot be shared  
As if your own beautiful cancer cell!  
A bigger wound, it comes back  
Torture you on and often-  
as fresh memory does!  
No one to trust? No one to care!!

See the open sky, feel the air, and  
Go and sit in the lap of a piece of nature  
If humans are not enough then  
Why not be part with mother Nature  
Talk to Her...  
She is seeking you  
Baby Wound needs to be in the lap of  
An Original Caregiver  
An Original Mother!  
And, what to fear when mother is here?

---

*\*Ariful Islam Laskar is an Assistant Professor of English at Daffodil International University, Dhaka (Bangladesh). Besides teaching, Ariful invests time in research, writes columns and pens poetry.*

## Surbhi Sharma

### *1984 through Imagess*

At midnight of winter  
 women carry the furniture  
 and drag all to an alley  
 for the last rites  
 of half-burnt bodies left in the house.

A kid shudders and hides behind  
 hand-drawn cart of his grandfather  
 watches him burning alive  
 while grandmother limped out  
 pulls the hand of a kid and draws cart  
 to collect remains of the body  
 and throws it among others.

As the smoke billows from the burning homes  
 and burning human flesh assails the nostrils.  
 one captive girl, dupatta covering her head  
 reliving the tales told by the grandmother  
 of the womenfolk during the Partition  
 who jumped to death in wells  
 to save their honor from prowling demons,  
 unties her trousers for life,  
 as the senators bake bread  
 over the half burnt human bodies  
 of innocent men whose gullible sons remain  
 hidden in water tanks of the houses all night  
 unaware of the sponsored pogrom  
 and the game of fire around.

The streaming eyes of mothers  
 douse the smouldering tyres around  
 the necks of the dears.  
 Who can see the valiant sons of India  
 butchered by hired assassins?  
 Who can see juvenile roasted on Capital roads?  
 For days the city burns like an inferno  
 November torments like June  
 as orphaned girls collect tattered turbans  
 of brothers, fathers and uncles  
 as good wives drape  
 in eternal white

for the Antim Ardas.

## II

Barbarism rules 1984.  
 as compassion gets up the scaffold  
 and blood coagulates among  
 in the veins of the spurious  
 custodians of law turning blind eye  
 to the dance of death  
 enacted by the khadi clad  
 gangs of arsonists, looters and rapists.

Life anneals and seals  
 as a pregnant woman  
 carrying a child on her waist,  
 runs madly to save three lives,  
 passes burning tyres,  
 burning pyres of kith and kin  
 slaughtered without a stain of sin.

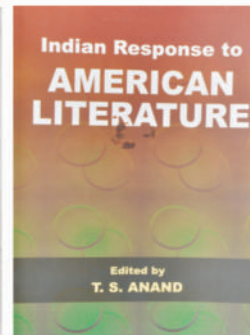
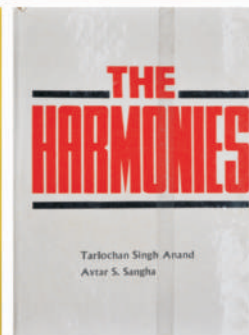
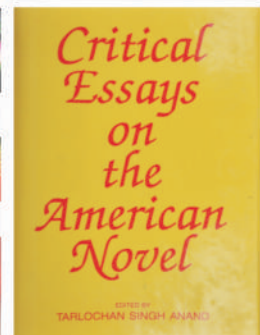
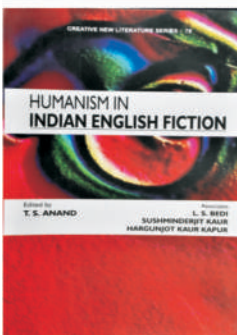
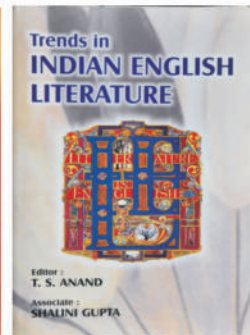
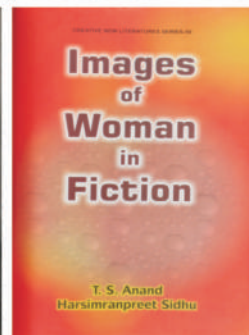
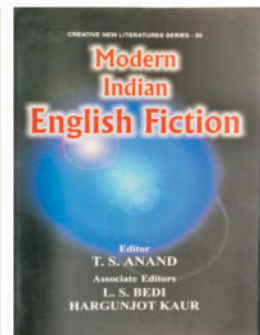
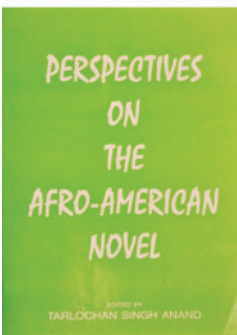
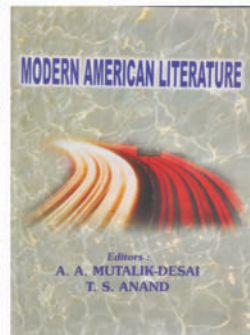
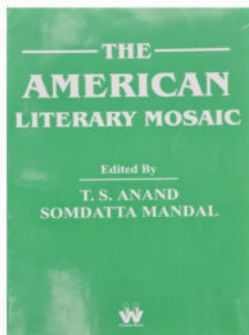
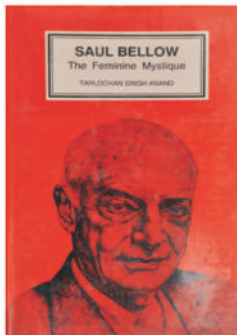
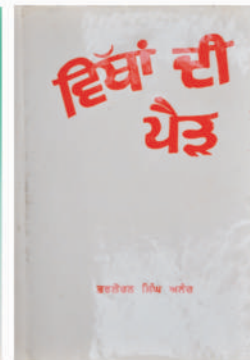
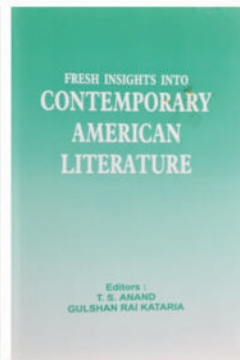
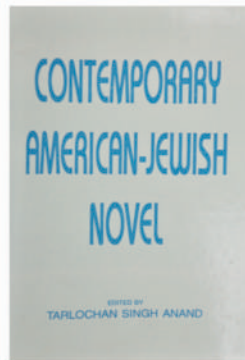
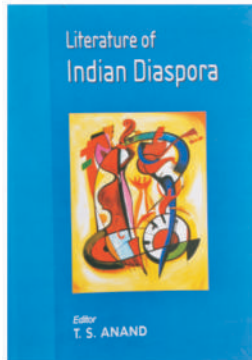
Deafened by the war cries  
 of human race gone wild  
 her feet chiming silver anklets  
 move in familiar alley  
 of hymns and community kitchen  
 in smoke and flames,  
 the trauma triggers  
 the dissolution of a life  
 throbbing inside her,  
 her legs drip as hysterical sobs and watery eyes  
 fix on a boy she nurtured like her son  
 whose sickle silences her sobs  
 and erases another story  
 as a sweeper carries her  
 from Sultanpuri street.

---

*\*Ms. Surbhi Sharma is pursuing research on Greek and Hindu mythology at Himachal Pradesh University,. Her poems have appeared in The Criterion: An International Journal in English and in Muse India. Besides her research and creative pursuits, she writes blogs and is a freelance*

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