



# Literary Voice

*A Peer Reviewed Journal of English Studies*

*U.G.C. Care Approved Group 'A' Journal*

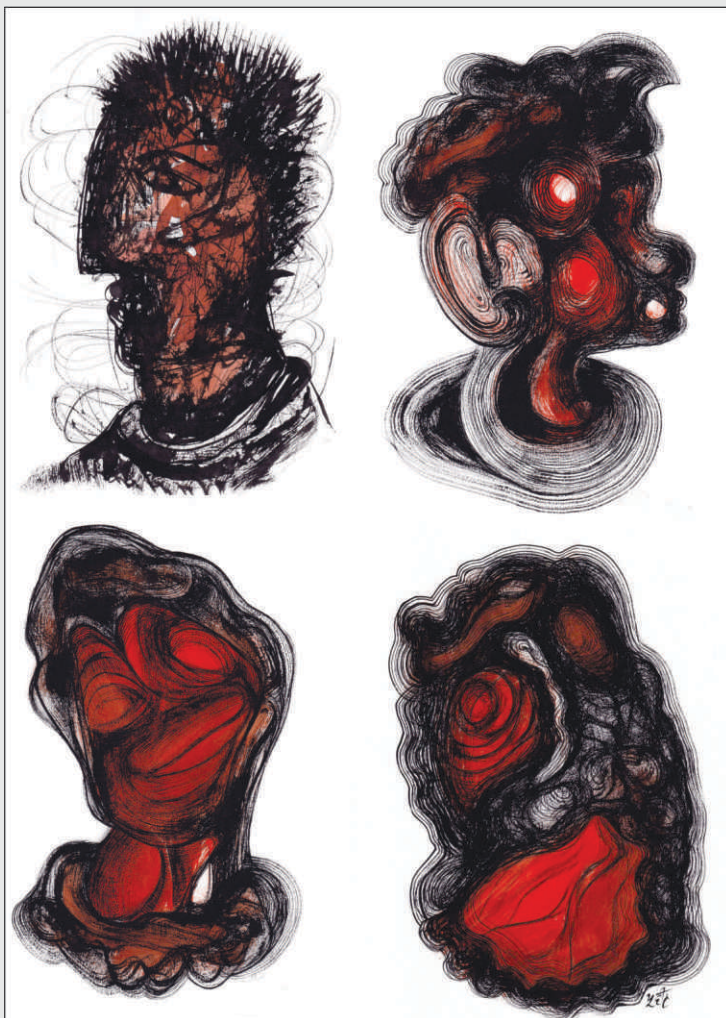
**ISSN 2277-4521**

*Indexed with Web of Science ESCI, Cosmos, ESJI, I2OR, Cite Factor*

Number 12

Volume 1

March 2020



**Editor : T.S. Anand**

[www.literaryvoice.in](http://www.literaryvoice.in)



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## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Literary Texts have always been analysed and interpreted in the context of "Poetics" extant. With the passage of time Aesthetics originating in certain geographical regions of the globe, are taken recourse to by the researchers for scrutinizing various genres of literature, past and present. In the process the tools of analysis attain universality, thereby enriching the critical canons across the continents. *Literary Voice* March 2020 edition is a modest extension of the critical inquiry directed at evaluating literary texts through the lenses of current tropes and theories. The present number comprises thirty seven research articles that focus on various streams and genres of British, Canadian, American, Native American, Afro-American, Lebanese-American, South African, Turkish, Eritrean, Diaspora, Indian English, Dalit and Children literatures, from the standpoints as varied as Nick Haslam's concept of dehumanization, Schiller's theory of cultural imperialism, Freudian psychology, Feminism, Existentialism, New Historicism and Marxian/Fanonian concept of lumpenproletariat. Ecological concerns, contested ideas of normal or normality, ethics that govern the 21st century ecological citizenship, contamination in contemporary multicultural national entities in the shape of prejudice, marginalization of voices, multiple identities and allegiances, ramifications of colonial rule and multifold methods of exploitation of the native populace, the dynamics of Indian society with its regional biases and the dystopic impulses inherent in the BPO culture, analysis of representation of trauma, and the vital existential dilemmas about happiness, progress and stability have been probingly interrogated. Besides, articles focusing on dilemmas of diaspora subjectivities; de-stigmatization of disability among children; memory aiding the distressed to a sane understanding of an irrational world; the cultural metaphor of the vampire being stripped of its supernatural baggage; the "gaps and silences" in the epic story, *Mahabharata*; the new possible paradigm of meaning-making in the ancient Indian classic, the *Ramanaya* against the backdrop of 'liminality' and rising scepter of surveillance over literary and online space have been critically evaluated. A couple of articles on ELT interrogate the methods and processes which help a learner to achieve better proficiency in the language through traditional and Google classroom teaching.

Apart from varied critical responses to literary texts, *March 2020 Number* comprises a thought provoking scholarly write up by Prof. Swaraj Raj on 2015 Nobel Laureate, Svetlana Alexievich's *The Unwomanly Face of War*, an insightful review essay on Annie Zaidi's *Prelude to a Riot* by Dr. Lalit Mohan Sharma and a Book Review by Prof. Basavaraj Naikar. Poetry Column introduces Dr. Parneet Jaggi, Dr. Sadaf Fareed, C. Rosy and Neha Singh, the vibrant new voices in Indian English Poetry.

As usual we, in the *Literary Voice*, look forward to your feedback from the safe environs of home..

T. S. Anand

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**“Community, Identity, Stability” in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake***

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*Abstract*

*The term 'dystopia' is applied to the fiction which portrays a horrifying world with ominous tendencies leading to a disastrous future. Ironically, on the surface, life is utopian as in both the novels *Brave New World* and *Oryx and Crake*, but underneath everything is either corrupt and rotten as in *Oryx and Crake*, or sickeningly controlled and satisfied as in *Brave New World*. But both of them lack real happiness, humanity and real pleasure of living. The world state motto “Identity, Community Stability” is reiterated in the twenty first century novel by Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*. These novels ask the vital questions, like: Is happiness enough? How much progress is too much? How far do humans have to go for stability? Is unethical scientific advancement desirable? These questions shall be discussed in the present paper.*

*Keywords: dystopia, social control, individuality, genetic engineering, conditioning, happiness*

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Dystopias and Utopias are the subgenres of the speculative fiction and science fiction that explore social and political structures. Dystopian fiction, sometimes combined with the apocalyptic fiction, explores a dark nightmarish world wherein society is characterized by poverty, squalor and oppression. As per the dictionary meaning, a dystopia is a community or society that is undesirable or frightening. Dystopias are generally about the present times; though they may be set in the near or distant future but the scenarios projected in them are just some steps ahead of the present situations. In the dystopias written in twentieth century and after, the societies portrayed have terribly sickening features, like corporate control, or bureaucratic control, or technological control, or philosophical/religious control. Novels as *Nineteen Eighty Four*, *We*, *Running Man*, *I-Robot*, *The Matrix*, present a world which is infested with fear, threat, and sorrow though *Brave New World* presents a society which has seemingly happy and perfect people, and a widespread optimism which makes the reader feel that human life has gained perfection and the world is not short of being called a utopia. This ideal world is mercilessly satirized by Huxley. The anxiety that drives this novel lies in the widespread belief in technology as a



future remedy for all problems caused by war and disease. The clear warning about the unchecked technological advancement, given by Huxley through his 1932 classic dystopian novel *Brave New World*, is reiterated by Margaret Atwood in her 2003 novel *Oryx and Crake*; both novels have a lot in common. The common theme is that of human identity being threatened by the excessive and unethical advancement in science and technology. Both the novels portray a dystopian society in distant future where the progress in bioengineering has changed human species greatly; and in order to create the ideal human being, they have stripped the species of some of its most remarkable traits.

The motive of the World State in *Brave New World* is to achieve a crime free, happy, conforming society. For this, a combination of bioengineering and exhaustive conditioning is used in the brave new world, the 2,000 million standardized citizens have been 'hatched,' not born; to fill their pre destined social roles which are just like cells of the huge body politic. By using hypnopædia, the infants are taught passive obedience, material consumption and mindless promiscuity; in later life free handouts of 'soma' pills are given; and they flock to Community Sings and Solidarity Services. Every aspect of life is reduced to the level of social utility, even the dead bodies. All this is done just to achieve the motto of: 'COMMUNITY, IDENTITY, STABILITY.' The presiding deity of the World State is Ford; and 'His fordship' Mustapha Mond is the Resident Controller of the Western European zone, one out of the ten zones. The title of this masterpiece has taken the form of a media catch phrase, arousing the images of ultra modern and idiosyncratic development posing a threat to human liberty. Similarly, the world of *Oryx and Crake* is a product of highly unconventional and zany scientific progress, thrashing human freedom and identity to pieces. The world of *Oryx and Crake* is based on the steady exaggeration of the most dismal ongoing developments in Western society, like internet porn, genetic engineering, capitalist domination, and segregated living. It too portrays a world where the scientists cause havoc by genetic manipulation, driven largely by the profit motive. The RejoovenEsense scientists are coming out with the new and better ideas every day. Some finest examples are: pigeons, wolvogs, ChickieNobs and finally, the perfect humanoid creatures called Crakers, alternatives to humans, with all desirable traits which assure a stable and happy society. One natural question that strikes a sensible reader is: Where is the government? Perhaps, this is one of the most surprising aspects of Atwood's future world portrayed in *Oryx and Crake*. There is an absolute absence of any traditional form of government. The entire idea of nations seems to be redundant and the biotechnology compounds seem to be governed by their own authority. Similar to Huxley's concept of humans ranging from Alphas to Epsilons, is Crake's idea of Crakers, who are beautiful and docile grass eating creatures, with UV resistant skin, controlled sexuality, and no interest in history, art or emotions.

Actually, Dystopian fiction is used to provide fresh perspectives on problematic social and political practices that might otherwise be taken for granted or considered natural and inevitable. In these novels, the social stability is being bought at the cost of human liberty and identity. "Everyone belongs to everyone else," whispers the voice to the sleeping young, in Huxley's brilliant and advanced future world—the hypnopædic suggestion discouraging commitment and uniqueness in friendship and love. It can be said that in this world, everyone is everyone else as well. The purpose of the fetal conditioning, the power of convention, and the hypnopædic training cast each human being into an identical part in

the society, valuable only in one sense, i.e. for the purpose of making the whole social set up run smoothly. In such a world, exclusivity is useless and uniformity is bliss, because social stability is the only thing that matters. Similarly Crake designed the Crakers to take the place of humans on the earth, after the destruction of human kind with a special disease. Crake removed everything that was wrong with human species, while realizing the idea of perfect species which would, unlike humans, neither destroy the earth nor themselves. There had to be changes in the biological structure so that these creatures feel no need for clothes and houses which would remove the concept of status and consequently the chances of the social hierarchy. The Crakers, like animals, go into heat at a certain time and have sex only to reproduce and they die at 30, so they don't have the midlife crisis. They are designed to be ignorant of the world at large, they live in a small village, do what they are told and they are unaware of the concept of violence. In the beginning of *Brave New World*, the D H C smugly elucidates the biochemical technology which is nothing less than an assault to human individuality; the Bokanovsky's Process promotes the production of dozens of identical eggs and deliberately deprives human beings of their unique, individual natures and controls them overtly. The production of the "sub-human" people, capable of work but not of independent thought - the Gammas, Deltas, and Epsilons - is accomplished by careful poisoning with alcohol. In Huxley's world, individuality is plainly unattainable for these lower-caste men and women. As a result, society flourishes on a large foundation of identical, easily controlled people. Stability is gained but individuality – the desire and ability to be distinctive – is dead. Booker states that the texts like *Brave New World* and *We* are "defining texts of the genre of dystopian fiction, both in vividness of their engagement with the real- world social and political issues, and in the scope of their critique of the societies on which they focus."

"When the individual feels, society reels," Lenina tells Bernard, who, beyond his peevishness, longs for a genuine human emotion. Love seems to be a threat to the stability of the society because that too means acknowledging and cherishing other's unique identity. The brave new world provides an alternative i.e. recreational sex, the social and ritual expression in "Orgy-Porgy", designed to blur the distinction between emotions and urges. At the Solidarity Service, Bernard feels that it is a degradation of human feelings. John, the savage too suffers intensely, seeing the representation of this orgy at the feelies, and commits suicide, as his most cherished feelings of love and of self, are violated. The official dope soma serves to keep people away from the stressful effects of pain and stress – disappointment, grief, humiliation, – the unique reactions to conflict are still found in certain people on certain occasions in the brave new world. They solve their problems by swallowing a few tablets or taking a soma-holiday, which removes or covers the negative feelings and also cuts off the possibility of any socially disruptive or revolutionary action. Therefore, use of soma is encouraged as a means of social control. John's plea to the Deltas to throw away their soma goes unheeded because the 'Soma-tized' people are not even aware of their own degradation; they are not even conscious of their being human. In *Oryx and Crake*, Crake's BlyssPluss Pill is introduced to the people as a prophylactic drug which eliminates sexually transmitted diseases and misplaced sexual energy, and blocks testosterone; but actually it is a birth control pill. Crake wishes to end the problems arising from the pressure on resources due to overpopulation. But actually this pill is spreading a

deadly virus to wipe out the entire human race to be substituted by humanoids named Crakers, the calm, stable and docile creatures, who pose no threat to each other or the planet because of their conforming nature.

There are still some traits which Crake couldn't remove, though he claims to have done so, like: their dreams, their singing and even their curiosity. The Crakers quite early in life express a wish to know who created them, and what the things in their surroundings are. Much against Crake's motives of keeping religion out of their life, the Crakers think of Crake as God and Snowman as his prophet. They are created to be followers, not achievers; this is a shameful thing for human species. After the end of the original species, the humanoids will be living an animal life, devoid of not only physical comforts, but also the ideas, plans and ambitions to rise in life. This is plainly an offense of pushing humanity down to the animal existence. Actually, the luxury and comforts of the compound life portrayed in the novel are similar to those of *Brave New World*. The world in *Oryx and Crake* crashes, because of the loss of control by Crake. He fails to hold the hi-tech world in place, leading to a catastrophic end of humanity. But the World State Controller is capable enough to maintain and control the situation as peaceful and stable, as, by the end of the novel, the human species fails to get rid of the manipulations of the World State, despite the huge effort, perhaps due to the power of convention induced by hypnopaedia and mob psychology. Helmholtz and Bernard are banished to the Falkland Islands, giving some hope of retaining some freedom within the restrictive society. In *Brave New World*, the battle for individuality and freedom ends in a crushing defeat, while the technologically advanced world of Crake collapses and only a handful of survivors are left to face the post apocalyptic horrors. Being dystopian in nature, but on the surface utopian novels, *Brave New World* and *Oryx and Crake* describe the future events that seem fantastic and somewhat unrealistic to the contemporary world. But, today, however, most of those things have become reality, to a certain extent. The World State's motto is "Community, Identity and Stability" which though not framed like this, but is absolutely shared by Crake; and the individual freedom has been totally crushed. Technology is used to control the society in both the novels and the dangers of genetic engineering are visible. Psychological conditioning, promiscuity used to ensure happiness and the extreme pursuit of happiness through drugs and mindless consumption are also the shared themes; so are the themes of destruction of the family unit, and sadly the incompatibility of happiness and truth.

### **Social Control through Technology**

In both the novels, importance is given only to those sciences that directly affect human beings. They don't talk about nuclear energy or space science, rather elaborate on physiology, biology, chemistry and psychology. The World State and the corporate leaders use these sciences to achieve stability and control. These sciences are used for genetic engineering, cloning, splicing, and making drugs like Soma and BlyssPlus, the wonder drugs. In addition to these, they exploit the human psychology through hypnopaedia and conditioning techniques. Apart from these, the most disturbing element is the most competent private police group by the name CorpSeCorps, something like "Big Brother" in the 1984, CorpSeCorps is aware of the smallest and the most secret move made by the people of the compounds, that is what leads to the mysterious death of Crake's parents, his uncle, and Jimmy's parents, just as the vaporization of people in 1984. The World State controllers

take care of not informing the people about the new scientific discoveries. Science and technology in *Brave New World* do not go hand in hand, as they do in *Oryx and Crake*. The World State uses and promotes technology, that is productive and useful but, does not encourage scientific research, fearing that they might fail to control what scientific research might discover; which exactly happens in *Oryx and Crake*. A glitch in Crake's scientific excesses leads to an unforeseen disaster and leads to the apocalyptic situation. Herein lies the difference between the two worlds. The brave new world is thriving as a utopia, despite the dystopian conditions, owing to the cleverness of the controllers; while the blissful corporate world converts into the post apocalypse world within seconds.

### **Individual Freedom**

In *Brave New World* the motto of the World State is "Community, Identity and Stability" and the government takes care to keep these three key words as fully functional. Community is, in a way, the result of identity and stability and it is also achieved through solidarity services and sexual orgies. It is also accomplished by giving the citizens a perfect life and they have to conform to the social codes. In Atwood's world too, people living in the compounds lead an excessive and luxurious life; and enjoy a higher sense of living. Scientific research is capitalist driven in the compounds. The Corporations use science to device ways to produce more at a low cost; hence maximizing their income.

Identity is a result of genetic engineering; all citizens are harvested according to the state needs. Then, they are conditioned through hypnopaedia and behaviorism to be useful social cogs. The society has five classes and hereditary social groups. Those who feel different in *Brave New World*, like Bernard Marx or John, the savage, are immediately declared outcast and strongly criticized, because state's motto is completely mismatched with individual freedom. All this is done to ensure stability, but the government tries by all means to keep its people happy. The cloning system also helps establish stability because genetically identical individuals don't generally come into conflict with each other or the system. The Director himself says that Bokanovsky's Process is one of the major instruments of social stability.

### **Genetic Engineering**

Genetic engineering refers to manipulating the DNA or RNA of an organism in order to change its basic inherited characteristics. In the brave new world, humans are being produced and bred in bottles, which is quite disturbing. Just as the mass production of goods, the World State produces the calculated required number of individuals of every caste, which prevents overpopulation and curbs the risk of social instability. The DNA is manipulated by adding alcohol or chemical additives to create either very intelligent creatures, i.e. Alphas or semi- morons, i.e. Epsilons. Standardized mass production ensures stability in the society. In the world of *Oryx and Crake*, large scale splicing is the most exciting thing being done in the OrganInc and RejoovenEsense labs. Many new hybrid animals have been created and still more are on the way. Not only creatures, food is also being produced as simulation and the real products have become a rare delicacy. The human organs are being grown in the pig body, and human tissues are used to grow babies to meet requirements of the parents, much like the harvested babies of the brave new world. The humanoids too are the result of the bioengineering done in the Paradise dome of Crake.

In *Brave New World*, humans are detached from families and being emotional is regarded as obscene. The state controls the number of citizens that would live on the surface of the earth. They can increase or decrease this number as per the needs of the society. A stable society needs a balance of intelligent and stupid people because society has all sorts of works for all of them. Mustapha Mond elaborates on the "Cyprus Experiment" under which they had produced exclusively Alpha Pluses on a distant island. As a result nobody wanted to do the dull and menial work and as a result, civil war broke out. Genetic engineering is one of the most powerful means of the state to control and maintain the society. The excesses of genetic engineering in both the novels raise philosophical and ethical questions, like "How much is too much? How far is too far?"

### **Conditioning**

In *Brave New World* all the humans are conditioned to serve the society's needs and to enjoy the work they do all their lives. One tool to condition the people is biological manipulation; by preparing the embryos for the levels of strength, intelligence and aptitude for a stipulated job. Another equally powerful and probably the more unethical tool is the psychological conditioning. Starting with infants, humans at every stage are conditioned to like or dislike certain things using behaviorism. Sleep-teaching is used to influence a child's social consciousness and make him fit to be placed into a social caste. These humans are conditioned to be satisfied and happy with their lives, to be respectful to others, whether from higher or lower castes, and never to question the World State decisions. Children are also taught that unique thinking is bad and so is being alone. Thus, community life is the mantra to be a good citizen. People are more of automatons than humans, conditioned to belong to the consumer society. *Oryx and Crake* paints a world where people are not conditioned, rather forced to be conformists, more like the people of Oceania in 1984. The strict surveillance instills a deep fear in their minds and they train themselves to be followers rather than skeptics. Human individuality, free thinking and unique perspective are crushed; moreover, the people are not even free to disapprove anything in the corporate structure.

On the surface, these stories may seem to be merely science fiction novels, but upon deeper inspection, it becomes clear that they deal heavily with the current social conditions of the world. Themes of caste (*Brave New World*) and class (*Oryx and Crake*) division and the gated communities are prevalent in both the scenarios. If analyzed through a Marxist perspective, the division between the rich and poor and gated communities clearly relate to Marxist ideologies, like the value of material possessions and the discrimination between high and low. Both the novels are similar in many aspects and clear parallels can be drawn between almost everything big and small, from Feelies vs. Hott Totts to the Soma vs. BlyssPlus pills and to the secure compounds for the elite. But there are some dissimilarities too; the major one being the consequence of the excesses as apocalyptic in *Oryx and Crake* in contrast to the self-sustaining absolutely controlled world in *Brave New World*. *Oryx and Crake* seems to be the brave new world gone wrong. Actually, the outright collapse of the world due to the BlyssPlus seems a little forced, when coming from the mastermind like Crake, proving him to be a lesser genius than the World State Controllers. *Brave New World* can be read as a subtle censure of the excesses of science, while the condemnation in *Oryx and Crake* seems to be

more explicit. *Brave New World* achieves its aims quite neatly and succinctly; while *Oryx and Crake* lacks any final message. Atwood has nothing to say about the future of Snowman. If he has to live like an outcaste, ill, bug bitten, scared, hungry, and deteriorating, then what is the point in living at all? He rejects any intentions of befriending the other survivors of his species too. In such a situation, Snowman's life is pathetic and the ending of the novel doesn't sound quite impressive or convincing. Overall, *Oryx and Crake* is an interesting and impressive novel, with two subgenres combined into one, i.e. dystopia and post apocalyptic novel. The striking similarities between the two novels are remarkable, as both portray the horrifying future in a dystopian society. The gripping fear of the collectivism based utopian models being actualized have been realized in the twenty first century, exactly as predicted by Beauchamp many decades ago:

Utopias are realizable. Life is moving toward a utopia, and perhaps a new age is beginning, an age in which the intellectuals and the cultivated class will dream of avoiding utopia and of returning to a society that is non-utopian, less perfect but more free. (24)

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## Memory Revisited: Struggle and Survival in Sharon Pollock's *Constance*

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### *Abstract*

*Sharon Pollock attempts to lift the veil from the historical records of events that lay shrouded in mystery like Constance Kent, an English woman who confessed to a notorious child murder of her step-brother that took place when she was 16 years old. She makes her confession after 21 years. The paper seeks to focus on the various reasons for this event through Constance Kent's memory of struggle and her battle to survive the oppressive family conditions. The paper also offers a comparison with another Pollock play, Getting It Straight where Eme, a genuinely mentally distressed woman is attempting to work out a sane understanding of an irrational world. The political implications are widespread in the conflict that the protagonists face with patriarchy and society. Memory plays an important role, so as to give an un-linear plot to the plays, moving forward and backwards between different social planes; age and time lapses.*

*Key words: Political, patriarchy, confinement, madness, history*

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Sharon Pollock (née Mary Sharon Chalmers,) is one of the most accomplished living playwrights in the world today. Her plays cover several aspects of social, political, psychological, and cultural reality. In Pollock we find her compulsory need to write plays which reflect her true sense of the war and struggle between the personal and the political realms of the individual, pitted against the authority or institution that controls, manipulates and determines one's life according to its need and self-interest.

Pollock claims: "I moved into writing... out of a need to confirm that the work I was doing was important. It's destructive to the soul to do stuff that is *never* grounded in your own reality...." (qtd. in Zimmerman 1991, 36).

The main idea in her plays is to show the personal cost and sacrifice given, in not conforming to the behaviour expected by the authorities, and from here the real conflict begins. The starting point for every play, as Pollock says: "is a question that haunts" (qtd. in Zimmerman 2008, 7) her. This question is what drives the playwright to probe history and come out with possible answers through the medium of theatre, crossing the barriers of gender, class and race. This is done through memory which is ever elusive and rests in the hands of those who have it.

A graphic portrayal of a woman's suffering in marriage and of her daughter's determined resistance figures in *Constance*. It is also based on a real incident which took place in 1860 in which a three year old infant was brutally murdered. The murder remained unsolved with the real culprit never getting caught, in the vein of similar unsolved murder mysteries like *Blood Relations*, *Saucy Jack* and *End Dream* which are all revisions of historical crimes. *Constance* is also a moral investigation of the crime committed through the account given by

the hundred year old woman, where memory plays a key role.

As the play begins we see an unidentified male investigator who comes to interrogate a hundred year old woman named Ruth Emilie Kaye, about the brutal murder of a three year old infant named Francis Saville Kent. As the play proceeds we come to know that Kaye is the other name of Constance Kent, the step-sister who was suspected of having committed the murder eighty-four years earlier. At that point of time no fitting evidence and no apparent culprit could be found. Constance was discharged and her father without wasting any time sent her to a convent in France. After five years she returned to England to work as a probationary nurse at St. Mary's Home in Brighton. For some inexplicable reason, she confessed to the murder committed and her "statement", although not written in her own hand, was considered proof enough and at the age of twenty-one she was sentenced to twenty years in prison. After being released in 1885, she moved to Canada where she lived a long life.

The events that happened before the murder are of particular significance that is revealed to us only through Kaye's memory. It is not as much what conspired later that is important but what happened in the past – the context as recounted by Constance Kent's memory and what she remembers and shares with the investigator. This forms the central plank of the conflict. The male investigator visits Miss Kaye after 20 years of the murder, with the purpose of finally being able to expose the mystery but to be able to do that would mean to probe her memory and arrive at conclusions. Miss Kaye tried to recount her painful experiences one by one leading up to the murder, which did not interest the investigator. She wanted him to record these harrowing personal experiences of her life that only she could tell from her memory – a testament of seething reality she had to endure as a small child. The plot is un-linear, moving back and forth – a tale of her survival against all odds. Her memory shapes the tale of her personal experience and her reasons of behaving in a deviant manner, against her father and the relationships he had with his maids. Constance is shown to be an intelligent and brave person who is responsible for her own actions.

We must remember that there was another tryst with destiny, another greater conflict, another chasm remaining, which jeopardized Constance's and her little brother's future career. There was no one to come to the rescue of these two kids after the mother's death. It was solely on Constance's ability to survive this predicament and therefore her memory becomes so very important in her battle of struggling with inner disappointments and fears. Miss Kaye alias Constance narrates the incidents in snatches as it comes to her and focuses on incidents that shaped her upbringing – the strict discipline of her father, her mother's falling health, the responsibility of William on her:

How could I forget? They said...she was of strong and obstinate character,...even as a child...her nature was irritable and impassioned. (276)

The fact that she was "good at school" and "won prizes for good work and



behavior” went ignored. She had no one ever encouraging her except her mother, who was the only one to make her feel special and gifted:

MOTHER (*whispers*) Shut the door, Constance, lock it.

SOUND: *the door shutting, the lock turned.*

Now show me, Constance, let me see.

CONSTANCE: (*approaching*) It's special, Mama, it's special paper and it's special writing, and it's the only one the teacher gave out.

SOUND: *rustling of paper.*

MOTHER: A special prize for you. (276)

In another short play, *Getting It Straight*, revolving around suffering women and madness, unlike the stereotypical women, the protagonist of the play named Eme is someone who had interest in mechanical things and as a child she received encouragement from her mother just like Constance's mother felt happy and proud of her daughter's success at studies in school. Eme clearly remembers her mother telling her:

My children

Have grown and my mother is old now so

She said

You do well in math, eme, excel

In

Things mechanical like change the oil and washers

(239-240).

The mother tries to make the facts clear to Constance about her siblings' dim future prospects because of her father's neglect for their “schooling or marriage prospects” (282). She fears that Annie and Lizbeth will end up as “unpaid members of the domestic staff” (282). Edward's dream of becoming a naval officer will also remain unrealized and he will end up working “At some trade” (282). At the moment the mother could only save Constance and make her financially secure by transferring her own funds of one thousand pounds in her name.

Mother: Constance, one thousand pounds for you. At age twenty-one. A secret. Tell no one...I can save you, and you will save William. I can save none of the others and, I cannot, save myself.

Constance: Yes you can

Mother: The others acquiesce, give in, accept, never question! And I in my isolation and illness can do nothing, nothing. You do not acquiesce, Constance, and I place my

faith in you. (282-83)

As with the rest of her plays, Pollock is more concerned with what led to the murder rather than who committed it. The case had been surrounded with many doubts, confusion and hearsays and the investigator's aim was to draw out the truth from the accused herself but he gets no concrete yes/no answer from Miss Kaye. Miss Kaye is surprised at his attitude, "You reject all that I do know, and desire only what I don't know. Isn't it strange" (308). Right at the beginning when the play begins, the power gap between man and woman in a patriarchal society is loudly pronounced which speaks of the subject of the play as well:

MOTHER: I only ask whether it appears proper to others –

FATHER: It's not your place to ask!

MOTHER: What's my place?

FATHER: You're no proper wife! And now you dare – . . .  
A crazy woman! (273)

Miss Kaye recalls the torturous treatment meted out to her mother, the mental trauma she went throughout and the element of fear in her heart that kept her from behaving in any independent manner. The psychological trauma of the mother and her children is revealed in the play, through the memory of Miss Kaye whose report was the only testimony of what happened with this family. The father with his own family of a wife and five children, kept a second woman named Mary a whore in the guise of a nursemaid who was supposed to take care of William, the youngest child in the house. However, Constance being the eldest child could understand that her father was ignoring and abusing her mother for a nursemaid and she complains.

CONSTANCE: She's supposed to look after William but she doesn't. Did you know that? She orders everyone around Mama! (277)

Constance knows the money spent on the household and on Mary comes from her mother's side:

CONSTANCE: (*whispers*) It's your money. Mama, your money paid for Road Hill House, and your money pays for Mary and Mary acts like she's mistress of Road Hill . . . (277-78)

Constance boosts her mother's confidence and asks her to face her husband for the safe future of her kids and when the mother confronts him he retorts callously,

FATHER: Who are you to question my decision?

MOTHER: I'm Edward's mother... You know I – I can't –

FATHER: Oh yes, we know, your health. Mental Health? That's your problem!. . . Lie around, weep, cry, incapable of the simplest action! (279).....

MOTHER: The money I provide is never spent in the children's interests, Edward's or the other's.

FATHER: I'll brook no more questions from a mad woman—

MOTHER: I am not mad!

FATHER: Enough! The subject is closed. Closed! Do you hear!

*SOUND: the slam of the door as FATHER exits the room above.*  
(279-80)

The Mother goes through lot of insult, abuse and even physical torture but is finally unable to make her husband do anything for the children as per her wishes. This aggravates her ill health. Constance tells William, "Ten babies, William, and five of them died and that made Mama ill. Made her sad" (281). Finally the mother's health deteriorates and she keeps developing a lot of physical problems, Constance makes an attempt to make her father see her mother's condition, "My poor mama's dying and you [the father] see nothing, know nothing! . . . Listen to Mama, hear what she's saying!" (287).

Pollock successfully shows the debauchery of the father who continues to cheat whoever he marries. Just after the death of Constance's mother, he marries Mary, whom he similarly ditches by sneaking out with the new housemaid Jeannie to her room. Mary chooses to ignore this fact knowing the licentious habits of the man only too well.

Once the mother dies the children start being ill-treated even more and if they did not do what was expected and asked from them, as punishment they were put in the "root cellar" (295) and locked till they howled away and their tears dried up. Constance kept her brother company and told him: "...Make it not bad inside your head and then, then they can't hurt you." (295) Keeping all the personal incidents fresh in her memory, Constance makes her heart even stronger and plans for an escape. As Miss Kaye tells the Male, "...Oh Constance dreamed of escape. Planned to escape. . . . Tried to escape" (291). She makes William cut off her "beautiful hair . . . short like a boy's" (291) and goes off with her brother changing his name from William to Bob, to find job as cabin boys on the ship. She makes up a small story of their walking from the town to the harbour to get the job and asks her brother if he was frightened or not and he replies:

WILLIAM: Ah-huh. *(pause)*

Are you frightened too? *(pause)*

You're strong. You're never frightened, are you. *(pause)*

Papa hit me and my lip bled and I cried and Papa hit me again, but you never cry. *(pause)*

CONSTANCE: I'm older. (292)

Despite her best efforts she and William get caught by the father and are severely

reprimanded. As punishment they were locked away in the dark underground cellar without food or water. The Father vents his anger on Constance in front of Francis, his youngest son from Mary, who is later murdered. All these incidents gave a terrible psychological jolt to Constance, who struggled to keep her senses and at the same time managed everything alone. When the family is against you, the plight of the children could become lamentable:

FATHER: Disgrace! You're a disgrace! To family, to your father, to the memory of your mother! Betrayal. Yes, betrayal, do you realise the talk, disguised as a boy? . . . Perversion. Unnatural. What mad thoughts entered your mind?

FRANCIS: Ball, Papa, ball.

.....

In several ways Constance's life parallels Lizzie's. Both were emotionally tortured and looked down upon, their needs of living a free, happy and satisfied life were trampled on and no amount of arguments and discussion with their father could liberate them from their stifling existence.

Miss Kaye gives the Male investigator an account of the oppressive conditions under which she was brought up. She wants him to record the harrowing personal experiences of her life that only she could tell:

I say the education of the younger members of the first Kent family, Constance and William was neglected, they were badly clothed, they were harshly disciplined. (290)

She tried to keep these memories ever fresh that remained a source of strength in the face of adversity and she remembered her mother's words that guided her throughout her life. Had she not been so brave and courageous she could have never gained independence. She has nothing to be afraid of as she also took the 20 years imprisonment for having killed Francis, to which she admitted after 5 years. Instead of focusing on why she did, Pollock focuses on how it could have happened. The historical truth may be far from the lived reality and to join them, memory acts as a strong link. This alone makes it possible for Miss Kaye to survive wherever she went. Miss Kaye is absolutely uninhibited whenever she speaks.

MISS KAYE: I've lived a full life as nurse and caregiver to the sick and elderly; I am founder of the nursing home in which we sit, founder of the National Association for Social Reform, and recipient of many tributes and messages of love and gratitude, including one from the King. Who are you – if you are not Death – to come here questioning and accusing me?

MALE: And if I am Death, at this very moment you are witness in a Higher Court than ever Constance Kent attended. Perhaps salvation or damnation is at hand here.

MISS KAYE: Perhaps what is at hand here is a seedy newsman who'd do anything for a story.

MALE: I'm one who's penetrated your disguise, that's who I am.

.....

MISS KAYE: You don't listen... you aren't the first one who thought he knew. Nor will you be the last. (290-91)

As Pollock is always more concerned with 'what' led to the events rather than finding out 'who' did it, Miss Kaye as her spokesperson tries her best to make the mental and physical tortures and harassments documented but fails to make it happen as the investigator was only interested in her as a culprit and not as a victim. She gets it documented by the Male only to see it being ripped apart by him after reading it:

MISS KAYE: Write this down. The two younger children of the first family were neglected and abused. Have you got that? . . . *SOUND: a page being ripped out, crumpled and tossed.*

MISS KAYE: . . . And you rip it out and crumple it up and throw it away.

MALE: I do

MISS KAYE: I imagine the original documentation met a somewhat similar fate.

MALE: Speak of the murder of Francis, that's what I'm here for. (297-98)

The Laingian philosophy has relevance in Miss Kaye and Eme's (*Getting it Straight*) case as it suggests that the ones who feel the world most keenly and in their state of craziness are in a better position to understand and say things one will not dare to utter in one's sanity. In a world which is governed by rules and conventions prescribed by – the men in power, the inner beauty and reality in women are constantly ignored. Those who adhere to this inner call become the outsiders and are typecast as mad and insane. Eme's madness may represent a greater sanity or a deeper understanding of the false rules running the society.

The final advice given by the mother is well received by Constance and throughout her life she does not give up her self-confidence and becomes well known by the dint of her hard labour and helpful nature. The Male figure in his anger tells her that she had been revealing the events leading up to the brutal murder of Francis “with no trace – of regret, apology or compassion – that peculiar mix of attitudinal and behavioural traits which so characterized the sixteen-year-old Constance Kent” (302), calling her perverse. To this the old woman responds emphatically, “I merely ask if the behaviour of the father was deviant, wicked or corrupt – and if you find it not to be so – by what standard is Constance condemned and Father absolved?” (302). The curt answer is, “All is coloured and determined by the irrefutable nature and fact of Francis' death” (302). After this follows a stream of questions put by Miss Kaye which are met with indifference:

MISS KAYE: What of the circumstances surrounding the

death of the mother?

MALE: I know nothing of that but what you tell me.

MISS KAYE: And is that worth nothing?

.....

MISS KAYE: You have no difficulty believing Constance capable of killing her half-brother when there is no evidence of anything other than love and affection in their relationship. What does that mean?

.....

MALE: What of her missing nightgown?

MISS KAYE: Why why why is there always a missing nightgown? Covered with blood no doubt to explain the absence of the same. Were waistcoats counted, I wonder? (303)

The conclusions reached by the Male investigator in his report are highly ironical:

Hatred of her father, jealousy of the second family, revenge for what she perceived as cruel treatment of her mother.... To murder, not Papa, but Papa's best beloved. In that action one sees the truly devilish nature of Constance Kent. (303)

Such is the collusion of authority with the patriarchal values and practices that it conveniently ignores the victim's suffering, terming her "mad" or "devilish". Wherever she goes, she's pressurized in different ways for a confession. The Powers to be such as the Church, Patriarchy, Society become agents of power and subjugation. Pollock however, never shows the woman admitting. The play ends with the last words by Miss Kaye, "Not! Guilty!" (309). She resists and succeeds to become her unique self, someone who is respected, admired and rewarded for her good work.

Pollock's protagonists always fight back. Eme in *Getting it Straight* is not guilty of suppressing her feelings or restraining her outburst of emotions just like young Katie controlled her tears, nor like Bob does she lose herself under the spell of alcohol. Rather, like Lizzie Borden in *Blood Relations*, she refuses passivity and fights back, reversing the order from being a sufferer to one who takes action against it. Margaret Hollingsworth praises the play in these words:

It's unlinear, concerned with getting it inside people's heads, into the thought process ... there's an earthy rhythmic sense..., an effort to be more universal, to find a wholeness, a diffusing quality. (qtd. in Bessai 84)

Madness in literary canon is mostly used to represent the image of a woman who embodies extremes of marginalization and powerlessness but protagonists like Constance

and Eme in *Getting it Straight* fights back and also reverses the view point of patriarchy which considers women as weak and emotional. She openly endorses her resistance to imprisoning roles assigned for a woman in society. As Pollock herself says,

. . . the play suggests that the ways of knowing—logical, rational, sequential—don't seem to have worked and that perhaps there are other ways of knowing, that women are particularly open to. (Rudakoff 220)

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## DEBBIE TUCKER GREEN'S NARRATIVE: STAGING IDENTITY, SILENCE AND TESTIMONY

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### *Abstract*

*Debbie Tucker Green is looked at as representative of new wave of ethnic minority British playwrights, who have increasingly sought to signify and embody the experiences of ethnic groups within Britain; the ways in which their identities are constructed and the ways in which their voice has often been marginalised. The paper attempts to analyse Debbie Tucker green's plays Random (2008), which deals with unambiguous nature of violence; racial prejudice and street crime. Her stage displays a relationship structured around testimony/witnessing—a relationship similar to the one between the audience and the characters, and events on stage; it offers a counter discourse by framing essentially black experience in multicultural Britain, and the controlling illustration of silenced/minority/black groups who's suffering needs to be expressed, articulated and be heard. The paper endeavours to locate the aesthetics of green's playwriting. random brings out the contamination in contemporary multicultural Britain, in the shape of prejudice and marginalization of voices. green is a part of movement that subverts and resists successfully, the British cultural forces; that do not provide space to the 'experiences', 'identity' and 'hybridity' of the 'other.' She describes the conditions that frame contemporary situation and culture and gives voice to the experience of the oppressed group by critiquing and highlighting the structures of oppression.*

*Keywords: British Black Theatre, Testimony, Identity, Silence, Political Theatre.*

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Debbie Tucker Green, contemporary British Black playwright, is looked at as representative of a new wave of ethnic minority British playwrights, who have increasingly sought to signify and embody the experiences of ethnic groups within Britain, and put on display the ways in which their identities are constructed and their voice has often been marginalised. She foregrounds black women's experiences and reactions to traumatic experiences of violence and abuse on stage. green uses lower case to write her name and title of her plays, to highlight her work more than 'self.'

In order to locate Green's dramaturgy, it is important to understand the history of contemporary British Drama. 1990s witnessed the rise of the so-called *in-yer-face theatre*; and political theatre in Britain was reinvigorated by many new voices. These voices were blatantly aggressive and provocative; and the stories they put on the stage challenged the disengagement of the society. The contemporary British stage explored “the staging of taboos, extreme violence, representations of graphic sex acts” (Osborne 222), with the aim to initiate an ethical discourse on society within the frame of critical consciousness. Aleks Seirz in his book *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today* says:



Most in-*yer*-face theatre challenges the distinctions we use to define. Who we are: human/animal; clean/dirty; healthy/unhealthy; normal/abnormal; good/evil; true/untrue; real/unreal; right/wrong; just/unjust; art/life. These binary oppositions are central to our world-view, questioning them can be unsettling. [...] Experiential theatre is potent precisely when it threatens to violate the sense of safety. (Sierz 6).

It underlined the common impulse to confront audiences and frame disdain through interrogation and parodies. However, in-*yer*-face theatre ignored issues such as racial tension, hybridisation or multiculturalism. Contemporary Britain has witnessed racial conflict but it is conspicuous by its absence from British stage. This provided younger black dramatists a new avenue, and by revising the terms of in-*yer*-face theatre, they have chosen to redirect their concerns towards questions relating to culture, identities, ethnic minorities so on and so forth.

The in-*yer*-face plays, by ignoring issues of race, region, class or ethnicity, mirrored the view of British Society implicit in the refusal of the conservatives to address such issues despite race riots, strikes . . . younger playwrights whose political commitments arise from their experiences as members of a minority race or culture have placed issue of race, ethnicity and class at the centre of generational divide that metaphorically represents British nation. Their plays make visible these sources of identity and conflict by situating question of history, identity and choice within specific social or geographic communities (Kritzer 79).

Nonetheless, it has not been an easy journey for ethnic minority British playwrights. In this new configuration, black British Theatre, emerged from decades of invisibility, difference and “otherness”. Initially, they dealt with issues such as origin, migration, displacement, diaspora but second generation black dramatists questioned such concepts as assimilation or otherness, and used stage to express their antagonism of not being accepted in Britain, even though they are part of it socially and culturally, right from birth. Onyekachi Wambu articulates, on the struggle these writers had to go through to find a unique style of writing which:

... wouldn't be marginalised as 'Black', 'Common Wealth' or any other kind of literature that put it at the edges. It would be fully fledged member of the broad range of British writing. These young writers were critical insiders not outsiders and had moved from post-colonialism to multicultural Britain. (Wambu 2011)

Black British Theatre has attempted to define their identity as a result of hybridization and within this hybrid urban culture many potent subcultures have emerged: rap music, lifestyle, violence and gun crime in multicultural Britain are significant subcultures which have found space on stage, to overcome silence and place audiences face-to-face with the most uncomfortable side of racism in Britain. Black women dramatists are still one of the most invisible minority groups within British theatre. And yet, black women playwrights articulate a counter-discourse by undoing all ideas of authority and power as manifested in established texts.

The goals of black feminist movement have been to completely expunge sexism and racism; and enable a recognition of the black experience. The main idea being to establish a common collective identity, while acknowledging the diverse identities which make up the 'black experience'. bell hooks, an iconic black feminist believes, "There is a radical difference between repudiation of the idea that there is a black 'essence' and recognition of the way black identity has been specifically constituted in the experience of exile and struggle" (Hooks 15). Black women playwrights have been making efforts to subvert the discourse of identity and belonging within black British cultural production which are "predominantly male narratives foregrounding male subjectivity" (May 111). But the concern of second generation black woman dramatists is:

The exploration of politics of identity in here and now, whose starting point is not the West Indies, but London, and sometimes encompasses white characters. It is recognition that cultural identities are hybrid and undergo constant transformation . . . there is also a hybrid approach that does not privilege racial difference but explores from a black woman's perspective gender, social and domestic relationships (Peacock 63).

The first black women's theatre company in Britain was Theatre Black Women, 1982 and later in 1985 four women got together to establish Talawa Theatre company in 1985 – it was founded as a reaction to the "lack of creative opportunities for actors from minority ethnic backgrounds and the general marginalization of black peoples from cultural processes that was prevalent at the time of the company's inception". (Talawa Theatre Company 2011) For British black playwrights the duality of stage/performance and narrative/testimony is an attempt to delve into the unacknowledged reality of violence and multicultural uneasiness.

Green's theatre can be located in the matrix of black British women playwrights who questioned the stereotypical images reiterated on the stage. Her stage engages with lives of individuals placed in a multicultural society; speaks to variety of audiences irrespective of colour, gender and economic class; it is uncompromising and compels one to witness the sharp contrast between the discourse of accepted social reality and experienced reality. green's theatre is no doubt uncomfortable and examines the visceral and experiential ideas in tune with in-yer-face theatre but her work is compellingly associated with the new wave of "young playwrights whose political commitments arise from their experiences as member of minority race or culture [and who] have placed issues of race, ethnicity and class at the centre of the generational divide that metaphorically represents the British nation" (Kritzer 79). Their plays make visible, these sources of identity and conflict by situating questions of history, identity and choice within specific social or geographic communities.

Green's theatre is strongly influenced by Brecht's epic theatre, for Brecht epic theatre makes no appeal to the spectator's capacity for empathies; its art lies in arousing astonishment rather than empathy. The key is the 'V' effect of *verfremdungseffekt* as Brecht explains, distancing becomes:

. . . necessary to all understanding. When something seems, 'the most obvious thing

in the world' it means that any attempt to understand the world has been giving up. . . The epic theatre's spectator says: I'd never have thought it – It's got to stop – The suffering of this man apall me, because they are unnecessary. That's great art: nothing obvious in it – I laugh when they weep. I weep when they laugh (Brecht 52).

Green constructs theatrical arena by removing props using language at its raw best and by attempting to remove the fourth wall, to ensure a powerful critical response from the audience. In face of contemporary society's lack of commitment, towards ethical and moral truths; and individualistic apathy – theatre can contribute by activating spectators' response – ability. Green's plays are marked minimalism, radical yet poetic and musical language, frenzied repetition, challenging English grammatical rules, dialects and urban accents jarringly juxtaposed; she underlines her will to give voice to the experiences of marginalized groups and including them as a part of the vast picture of British society, as the idea behind such language and stories. Her plays “incorporate linguistic innovations and thematic complexities that texture contemporary Black British women's drama to charge British theatre with an extraordinary challenging aesthetics” (Osborne 239). Her own ethnic origin and cultural location marks the political commitment to frame experiences of minority race and culture—to put issues of colour, race, ethnicity and class at the centre. She puts in images not only the most problematic but also equally horrifying and unpalatable narratives. In her *Dirty Butterfly* (2003), she frames voyeurism and domestic violence; in *Stoning Mary* (2005) she foregrounds rape, children as soldiers, and AIDS, in *Born Bad* (2003) Green unwraps the ugliest truth of the civilized world, incest; in *Trade* (2005) Green talks about sexual tourism.

In each of her plays Green attempts to look at the reality of characters in a multilateral, multiracial and multi-faith society. Her stage raises questions affecting human beings at large and therefore to convey the idea of marginalisation, sorrow, prejudices and violence the axis of her narrative has both black and white; actresses and actors; settings (or complete lack of it) and imagination. Her plays are an attempt to voice trauma.

## II

Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub in their seminal work *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, frame the idea of testimony and its relevance in literature. They argue that:

. . . testimony has become a crucial mode of our relation to events of our times – our relation to the traumas of contemporary history. (5)

In this process both the speaker and the listener must relive and articulate the traumas, however incoherent or entangled they may be. The listener must decipher the meaning from the memories and residues of the experience. Dori Laub and Felman underscore an important idea, that the act of testifying is a quest for truth – there may be gaps, ruptures but those are to be filled with listener/witness reflections and interpretations. Both

speaker and listener create a shared experience, and through narration, it “makes possible something like a repossession of the act of witnessing, this joint responsibility is the source of re-emerging truth” (Felman and Laub 85). It requires a face-to-face encounter, which implies 'here and now', an active presence and participation of the two 'faces' enabling the self to see the face of the 'other'.

Literature is the most effective way of representing and rethinking; and contemporary works of art “use testimony both as the object of drama and as the medium of literal transmission” (Felman and Laub 5), testimonial narratives gives a chance to “transgress the confines of the isolated stance, to speak for other and to others” (Felman and Laub 3). The writer's, voice turns into an 'unqualified testimony' —because by narrating what may not be completely objective—he/she tries to converge history both with imagination and subjective experience. To quote Felman and Lamb, “Literature bears testimony not just to duplicate or to record events but to make history available to the imaginative act” (Felman and Laub 1).

Green's *Random* was first staged in 2008; stage instructions clearly mention that only one black actress will play all the main characters. Characters are generically named as Sister, Brother, Mum, Dad and Teacher. It is a bare stage with a harsh white spotlight and each character is identified by accents and pronounced body movements. The unnamed characters suggest that 'identity is not portrayed as cultural, with its potential for change, but generic' (Goddard 61)—which enhances the pivotal idea of the play—that it may be happening to many black people but it could really happen to anyone. The singular presence becomes many people thereby opening the ambit for the audience's critical gaze. It allows for ethnic-political import of the play to become discernible. green puts to use techniques which produce alienating effects with sole aim to reveal race-motivated violence that occurs incessantly on British streets; to weave events in the narrative that disturb the spectator and offers insidious dichotomy between what the audience is expecting and what reality is. *random* reflects, “a viewpoint other than prescribed by the British media” (Peacock 60).

The play opens up with Sister, who describes a very ordinary day; with the brother getting up late and reaching school late; with Mum's concern that 'neither her children have eaten enough or dressed adequately' (Goddard 2009 61); her own anger at 'her man' who has not called her – it all builds up the picture of an everyday familiar routine. But this simple sense of normality is disrupted when the Sister receives the message:

Come home. Now. (tucker green 23)

When she gets home, the police are there. The presence of police stirs uncanny emotions in Sister, Mum and Dad; they feel threatened and are defensive about police's invasion of their private space. Their resistance gives way when the police informs them that Brother has been killed in an aimless random brawl in the street, during his school lunch hour. The awkwardness between the family and police are intentionally put on the stage to mark racially biased attitudes. Lynnette Goddard opines in her article, “there is an underlying assumption that the white boys are innocents caught up in coincidental attacks, whereas

insinuations of links to gang cultures and street assassinations are prevalent in the reports of the murders of black boys" (305).

In part two of the play, Sister provides the subjective descriptions of the events following a murder—including the process of identification of her brother's corpse and his horrific state. There are no images of violence but the dialogue is raw, graphic and unpleasantly bitter.

Sister : But his been  
Cut thru  
With a chunk of him gone  
now.  
He had an eye  
two.  
Now he got juss one.  
They try to pretty it up  
mek it look like he winkin . . .  
But  
You can't pretty up whass horrific Y' not meant so  
His mout'  
Look like a clown  
Now  
Wider than it should be.  
It slashed so much on a one side  
from there  
to there  
That juss he's face (Tucker Green 35)

Every other voice fades away, only the Sister remains as the narrator of the day's events, and also the witness of family's suffering and their grief. She describes the way the crime scene has become a "street shrine [. . .] flowers/ candles/ cards/ t-shirts/ bags / teddy bears/ Coke an' crisp / the flag of our island / Garvey's colours of Africa / a note from his form teacher/". She is angry about the absolute "silence shouting the loudest. / Cos it seems that / now no one wanna witness / what happened" (Tucker Green 2008 45) eventually Sister comes to the painful conclusion that after all, "[d]eath Usedta be for the old" (Green 42) or at least it "never used to be for the young" as Green puts it in an interview. (Tucker Green qtd in Goddard 299).

In *Random*, Green locates silence in the middle – brother's voice being silenced; Dad's active presence evaporates and is unable to 'speak'; Mum's anger is expounded through silence when she says, she "Don't have nuthin nice to say / Nu'un polite/ nu'un / broad castable, Nu'un/ righteous/ nu'un / forgiving /" (Green 42). Nevertheless the most resounding silence is that of a witness of the murder, which perpetuates violence. The silence is contextualised, it carries multiple meanings: it perpetuates abuse, violence, frames identity and also becomes a contested site for both profound intimate revelations and acutely critical reactions.

In the end Sister's voice acts as the testimony of who her brother was, the helplessness and

uncertainty of not knowing who killed her brother and the unbearable feeling of accepting that brother is not coming back. *Random* interrogates this coldly amoral attitude and prejudiced assumptions towards minority ethnic groups in a multicultural society.

Sister : Fuck this cycle of shit  
 And his poster of Halle  
 hangs over his bed  
 both of us clockin  
 It's an empty as it will be  
 now.  
 So I take a deep –  
 (*inhales*)  
 And don't wanna lose strength  
 Of his bedroom su'un  
 Ever.  
 And the house is quiet . . .  
 Y' know?  
 The house that never was . . .  
 is well quiet.  
 [. . .]Random don't happen to everybody so.  
 How come.  
 'random' havta happen to him. (*random* 2008 49)

Debbie Tucker Green chooses extremely traumatic, violent and unpleasant experience as the content of her plays; she has admitted in an interview to Seirz that she feels attracted to violence, stories “are quite mundane. Then they just get darker. I'm interested in normal situations that become dark. I find it intriguing; its all out there.” To decipher her 'fascination' it becomes relevant to situate her own experiences; as a member of ethnic minority group. She has said in number of interviews that in ordinary conversations with her own ethnic minority people, that media would handle case differently if the victim is a white person – then it would become 24/7 news but opposed to it are stories of coloured people, which seldom find themselves covered/ articulated by the national media. *Random* attempts to reformulate both national and individual identity; reconfigure that is obvious but not recognised and to evolve an eclectic cultural landscape that is based on a framework of visible/invisible connects and disconnects.

Green's dramaturgy is an on-going process of reclaiming the ethnic experience, from the margins to the mainstream; to discover and experience as new the voices that were always there; the experience of domestic violence and street crime. Her stage displays a relationship structured around testimony/witnessing—a relationship similar to the one between the audience and the characters and events on stage; it offers a counter discourse by framing essentially black experience in multicultural Britain.

In Preface to *Theatre and Politics*, Dan Reballato articulates:

. . . theatre is everywhere, from the rituals of government to the ceremony of the courtroom, from the spectacle of the sporting arena to the theatres of war[and] across these many stretches a theatrical continuum through which cultures both assert and question themselves. . . Over the past fifty years, theatre and performance have been deployed as key metaphors and practices with which to rethink gender, economics, war, language, the fine arts, culture and one's sense of self. (Reballato in Kelleher vii)

This in turn helps us to discern theatre/stage as a distinctive intersection; where the matrix of organised narratives and insignificant ordinary life unravels the operations of constructions. A 'theatre-situation' has the power to place performers and spectators in the same place at the same time. It invites the spectator to respond critically – through face to face encounter – with the character or the testimony – and recognise mutual vulnerability which encourage openness, and respect for difference. *Random* brings out the contamination in contemporary multicultural Britain, in the shape of prejudice and marginalization of voices; green is a part of movement that subverts and resists successfully, the British cultural forces which do not provide space to the 'experiences', 'identity' and 'hybridity' of the 'other.' She describes the conditions that frame contemporary situation and culture and gives voice to the experience of the oppressed group by critiquing and highlighting the structures of oppression.

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## Annie Dillard' Dialectical Vision of Nature in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

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### *Abstract*

Annie Dillard (1945-) is one of the chief American environmentalist writers. She published her masterpiece *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* in 1974, a nonfiction narrative about the natural world which won the 1975 Pulitzer Prize for general nonfiction . The present article studies Dillard's dialectical vision of nature which distinguishes her ecological vision. She looks at the contradictory processes of nature as essential and necessary in the natural world. Through her experiences, Dillard delves into nature and the analogy between human beings and nature on physical and spiritual levels which may heal the division between them. Dillard accepts the contradictions of the laws of nature and suggests that the beauty of nature can cure the disgust Dillard sometimes feels when confronted with the cruel aspects of the natural world. The power of Dillard's vision arises from her strength to maintain the contradictions within a single vision.

*Keywords: nature, dialectical, alienation, humans, ecological*

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Dillard is considerably interested in ecological systems and looks at humans as just a part of the vast natural world. She dedicated a significant part of her literary production to ecosystems; it is this remarkable blending of the human and nonhuman that distinguishes Dillard's ecological perspective. In her masterpiece *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (1974), Dillard is a solitary pilgrim who encounters the natural world and, indeed, she was criticized by some critics as taking a kind of retreat from society. However, through her experiences, Dillard explores nature and the correspondence between humans and nature on physical and spiritual levels which may cure the split between them. Dillard draws conclusions which highlight the contradictory forces in the natural world. I suggest that what distinguishes Dillard is her dialectical vision of the universe. She does not tend to make final explanations about human community, rather, her conclusions seem highly personal and depend entirely on her observations.

For Dillard, the first-hand investigation of the mysteries of nature is of great importance and she can grow from precise observations which only solitude may provide her. Meeting nature directly beyond human beings enables her to return to life with a new moving perspective. Two crucial questions may be asked about Dillard's ecological vision. Firstly, what does she deduce about the mechanism of nature and living beings? Secondly, how does she react to them? Both questions are significant in view of the current ecological tendency which considers the world as a sacred community and that all living things are like a family living in communion. What then does Dillard see in the world? In *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, she sees nature as "profligate," wasteful, marred with "extravagance" in the way that it throws off leaves, insects, lives" (76). It is deadly and productive, destructive and self-renewing, buzzing with "a swarm of . . . wild, wary energies" (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 229), sacred and cursed, adaptive and terrible.

Dillard emphasizes on the opening page of her book that the natural world is both beautiful and cruel. She wonders whether those two seemingly paradoxical aspects can go together. How can the beauty of nature which she is obsessed with be closely related to violence? "Looking so closely at eternity, Dillard was torn between beauty and horror throughout her 'mystical excursion' in *Pilgrim*." (Tietjen 104). The book begins with the narrator describing her old tomcat who used to jump from the window to her bed "stinking of urine and blood" and covered her body "with paw prints in blood" until she looked as if she was "painted with roses" (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 8). As Norwood remarks, Dillard attempts to "reconcile the images of beauty and horror: humans and their civilization are really the only true holders of moral beauty in the world; or the terror itself contains beauty if we only look correctly, or in the contradiction, beauty does not exist" (341). Dillard realizes that violence and beauty in the natural world complete each other and cannot be separated; they are two sides of the same coin. This is the rule of the wild and human beings should accept it.

Dillard depicts an image of the world which blends contrasts between good and evil, ugliness and beauty. She sees much cruelty compared to which human acts of evil seem pale and acceptable. She sees creatures eating other creatures alive; she sees a female creature eating its young once they are born. Dillard seems uncertain in her interpretation of such contrasts but seems to accept it and not be irritated by it. She even tells us that the "bloodiest and sacred creatures are my dearest companions (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 271)." Dillard thinks that one should be close to nature in order to see it better or, in other words, to acquire a new way of seeing. That is, to see things not in the traditional sense but to see things in the mind in order to be able to produce a more precise picture of things. To use Scott Slovic's words, Dillard "makes herself a more meticulous observer of the commonplace, an observer able to appreciate the strangeness, or otherness of the world" (10). Dillard tells a story of how she visited her aunt and uncle on a farm one day and wanted to draw a horse, "I couldn't do much of anything useful, but I could, I thought, draw. . . . I produced a sheet of paper and drew a horse" (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 26). Her cousins made fun of her drawing. All her cousins could produce much better drawings than her. They can do so because they are closer to horses and love them more than Dillard. They can, therefore, see them in their minds to draw them. It is this kind of seeing that Dillard wanted to acquire.

Two aspects of Dillard's vision can best be seen in the chapters "Intricacy" and "Fecundity" from *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. "Intricacy" celebrates the "extravagance of minutiae." "This is the truth of the pervading intricacy of the worlds' detail: the creation is not a study, a roughed-in sketch; it is supremely, meticulously created, created abundantly, extravagantly, and in fine" (153). In the midst of the excessive profusion, the narrator shows anxiety, "The wonder is — given the errant nature of freedom and the burgeoning of texture in time — the wonder is that all the forms are not monsters, that there is beauty at all" (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 165). Dillard concludes that anything can happen in such a world. In "Fecundity," Dillard expands on her anxiety that the world becomes a nightmare. She looks equally upset by birth and death. She focuses on the indisputable reproductive craving of all species:

I don't know what it is about fecundity that so appalls. I suppose it is the teeming evidence that birth and growth, which we value, are ubiquitous and blind, that life itself is so astonishingly cheap, that nature is as careless as it is bountiful, and that with extravagance goes a crushing waste that will one day include our own cheap lives. (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 181)

Endless repetition and senseless reproduction reduce life to “a universal chomp. “In this universe, mothers eat their children; children demolish their parents, and insects eat their mates. “What kind of world is this, anyway?” she asks in astonishment. “Are we dealing in life, or in death?” (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 197) Dillard struggles with the meanness and atrocities of life and speculates about which is wrong: the world as a “monster” or humans with their “excessive emotions” (199-200). The violent and apparently futile birth and death are spiritually “two branches of the same creek, the creek that waters the world . . . . We could have planned things more mercifully, perhaps, but our plan would never get off the drawing board until we agreed to the very compromising terms that are the only ones that being offers” (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 203). For Dillard, accepting the evil and beauty of the world is the cost that all living beings should accept to gain freedom.

Dillard shows the conflicting processes of nature which are the most essential and common processes in the natural world (Slovic, “Nature Writings and Environmental Psychology” 358). Dillard is astonished at the ability of some kinds of plants to survive in terrible conditions. The fecundity of nature may be admired and appreciated by human beings as far as it is related to plant life since it is central to human survival while such fecundity in rats or cockroaches as part of the animal world is rejected. Dillard seems to suggest a prejudice exists on the part of human beings with regards to the view of other living beings. In other words, human beings consider the matter of fecundity by how much it is of human interest and benefit. Also, Dillard suggests the insignificance of a human's role in this vast universe. As Berman points out, one should drop the ego when aiming at a truthful experience of nature and should be aware that he/she is only a part of a larger system (177). Dillard is bewildered by the natural world and wonders if the excessiveness of nature is justified and if there is a contradiction between human values and nature's values? She sees a lack of understanding or even ignorance in human beings regarding their natural environment. She writes about the locusts and how humans did not know for centuries how they suddenly appear and disappear. The idea which people believed for hundreds of years was that locusts were a plague sent by God which is a blatant form of human ignorance. Humans use the spiritual interpretation of a natural phenomenon and herein lies the problem.

Pamela A. Smith thinks that the story of nature is not just a casual passage of seasons for Dillard; it is a story of eating. The law of nature is the law of endless “chomp”: kill or be killed, eat or starve. Dillard reflects on the cycle of life and the food chain. Life seems to Dillard as a chain of creatures feeding on each other in order to survive. Dillard wonders about the violence of the natural world, “But we live creatures are eating each other, who have done us no harm.” (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 254, 267). To Dillard, it seems that the laws of

nature preserve its continuity and existence. Dillard accepts the contradictions of the laws of nature and suggests that the beauty of nature can cure the disgust Dillard sometimes feels when confronted with the cruel aspects of the natural world. As Margaret Loewen Reimer points out, Dillard's experiences "lead her to see the unity and the diversity, the order and the chaos, the uplifting and the destructive . . . . The power of Dillard's vision arises from her strength to maintain the contradictions within a single vision." (189)

For Dillard, the law of nature is not the survival of the fittest; rather, it is for those who accidentally survive. All creatures of the natural world have the right to survive which is why humans have no right to deny other creatures the right to live and progress. Things should be left to happen coincidentally; they should come together with nature's unique quality of coincidence and freedom:

The point of the dragonfly's terrible lip, the giant water bug, birdsong, or the beautiful dazzle and flash of sunlighted minnows, is not that it all fits together like clockwork- for it does not particularly, not even inside the goldfish bowl- but that it all flows so freely wild, like the creek that it surges in such a free, fringed tangle. Freedom is the world's water and weather, the world's nourishment freely given, its soil and sap. . . . (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 156)

This law of freedom which preserves the rights of all ecosystems to survive and progress is also a law of death. Progress will inevitably end in demise and "Evolution loves death more than it loves you or me" (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 198).

Dillard shows her relentless resistance to human's aggressive acts towards it in "Winter," a chapter in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. The story of the starlings in this chapter seems central to display her attitudes to the natural world. Dillard tells us how the starlings were introduced to America by a man who wanted to bring all the birds mentioned in Shakespeare's plays to America. The presence of those birds in America "was the result of one man's fancy" (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 45). One year, the people of Radford, Virginia decided to get rid of all the starlings in their village. They made several attempts to exterminate the birds but failed and the birds survived in spite of repeated efforts by people to kill them. It depicts the notion that one species seems unable to live while another survives. The birds merely live their lives in their environment so it is unfair that it becomes a nuisance to humans. This story, in fact, illuminates the theme that people's efforts fail if they wish to break the sacredness of the natural world order. The failure to get rid of the starlings stands for the failure of humans to be masters of the world. In other words, human interference with nature is unnecessary and futile as nature will continue to exist. The story of the starlings also shows human's weakness against the natural world.

Dillard's attentiveness, vigilance and close observation are admired by scholars and environmentalists. However, I agree with Pamela Smith who is perplexed with Dillard's policy of non-intervention. There is never a hint that she is moved to contribute to the World Wildlife Fund, campaign against the destruction of rain forests, push legislation against refrigerants that might expand the ozone hole or do any other ecologically minded things. Dillard tries to justify her policy of non-intervention in her essay "The Deer at Providencia". Dillard describes watching a young deer's day long fight to free itself after it

has been chained by Ecuadorian villagers. The fight is hapless and the deer is killed at the end of the day. Dillard narrates a journalist's amazement at her passivity. Dillard could observe but not take action. She says with indifference, "I looked detached, apparently, or hard, or calm, or focused, still. I don't know." Then she comments, "I was thinking . . . I have thought a great deal about carnivorousness; I eat meat. These things are not issues; they are mysteries" (*Teaching a Stone to Talk* 76). Hunting habits and killing customs seem facts of life. Like numerous things in the nonhuman world, strange killings and cruel feedings overwhelm the human world. Dillard is an active observer but not an active activist. She observes, records but does not make any suggestions to deal with things she observes. Bruce Ronda says, "In Dillard's writing, one feels the awful inner tension between wanting to control and wanting to let go; one sees the amoral careen of nature that separates it from our sympathy" (486).

While I can see a sort of sympathy towards the natural world and its living beings, I can also see a kind of unmistakable separation. Dillard shows uncertainty; she seems moved to goodness and sounds doubtful when witnessing brutal phenomena. Dillard confessed that in *Teaching a Stone to Talk*: "I alternate between thinking of the planet as home- dear and familiar stone hearth and garden -- and as a hard land of exile in which we are all sojourners" (137). Dillard presents vision of darkness, chaos and death together with light, unity and life

Dillard sees the possibility of correspondence among all living beings that supports modern man's attempts to live in harmony with nature but she is not involved with its practicalities. Life, Dillard says, "is a faint tracing on the surface of a mystery. . . We must somehow take a wider view, look at the whole landscape, really see it, and describe what's going on here" (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 16). Taking action, however, may take a very long time. But as we carry on, Dillard's efforts may help us repair the split between human beings and nature.

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# Dystopia and Dehumanisation: A Critical Analysis of Lois Lowry's *The Giver*

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## *Abstract*

*Lois Lowry's The Giver depicts a nightmarish dystopian society where state-sponsored dehumanization transmutes normal human beings into machines deprived of compassion and humanness. The current paper employs Nick Haslam's concept of dehumanization who views human persona an amalgamation of uniquely human (UH) characteristics and human nature (HN) characteristics that are intrinsically linked. The paper explores how stripping a human being of uniquely human (UH) characteristics and human nature (HN) attributes triggers animalistic dehumanization and mechanistic dehumanization respectively. The paper asserts that both the dehumanized and the dehumanizer become the victim of dehumanization because both the dehumanizations are mutually inclusive. In addition, the paper observes that it is the past memories that assist the protagonist (Jonas) to revive himself as well as all the people of the totalitarian state from dehumanization to humanization.*

*Keywords: Control, Dehumanization, Dystopian, Totalitarian, Utopia*

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## **Introduction**

Human beings have some intrinsic needs: food, sex and shelter. Luckily, humans are located in a world where these corporeal needs are fulfilled in one or other way. Apart from these needs, nature has endowed human beings with the capacity of rationality. Rationality is an integral part of a human being that distinguishes him from other living creatures and subsequently, enables him to make choices. Human beings have also some inborn characteristics like love, compassion and humanness that integrate as well as associate them to one another in a community. From the above discussion, it can be argued that human beings have certain key features like human ability, identity and humanity that confers them the highest stature among all the living creation. These key features of humans are protected in *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. As soon as these rights are violated, dehumanization take place.

## **Dehumanization**

Dehumanization is an act of denying human attributes to other fellow human beings. Webster dictionary defines dehumanization as: "the act of or process or instance of dehumanizing;" it proceeds by defining dehumanized: "to divest of human qualities or personality; make machinelike; make impersonal or unconcerned with human values" ("Dehumanisation" 337). It means dehumanization is a process of depriving human beings of innate human qualities like emotions and feelings and turn them into machines. Paulo

Freire in his work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* argues that “dehumanization [encompasses] not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but [also] those who have stolen it” (83). Freire delves deep to explain how an unjust social order creates a group of oppressors who wreak oppression on other humans that subsequently, results into dehumanization. Dehumanization can take away a person's individuality, the creative and basic aspects of his or her personality or his or her compassion or sensitivity towards others. Nick Haslam in his study “Dehumanisation: An Integrative Review” is of the opinion that human characteristics can be divided into two main categories: uniquely human characteristics (UH) and human nature characteristics (HN). The qualities, according to Haslam, that make a human being uniquely human are: civility, refinement, moral sensibility, rationality, logic and maturity. When an individual loses the said qualities and exhibits any characteristics like lack of culture, coarseness, amorality, lack of self-restraint, irrationality and childlikeness; animalistic dehumanization takes place. According to Haslam “Animalistic dehumanization involves one social group denying that another social group has the same set of uniquely human attributes” (262). The other category of human characteristics named as human nature (HN) is: emotional responsiveness, interpersonal warmth, cognitive openness, agency, individuality and depth. When an individual lacks the aforementioned characteristics and possesses any of the qualities: inertness, coldness, rigidity, passivity, frigidity and superficiality, mechanistic dehumanization occurs.

Mechanistic dehumanization involves the treatment of others as not possessing the intrinsic human nature (HN) characteristics but bereft of one or more of these qualities. Most often dehumanization is directed by an organization such as state to gain control over citizens. Dehumanization has been a reality throughout history and its emergence as a literary theme in literature comes to fore probably only after the dystopian literature. Daniel Lee in his work entitled *George Orwell* gives the reason of the dehumanization theme embodied in dystopian fictions. He maintains that dystopian societies are “imaginary worlds in which the worst of all possible social conditions pertain” (15). This indicates that the eventuality of dehumanization of citizens occurs maximum in a dystopian society. Hence, it is indispensable for the present research to penetrate the term dystopia. However, the term dystopia cannot be understood unless an overview of the term utopia is taken first.

### **The Concept of Utopia and Dystopia**

The word utopia has been derived from the Greek word “eutopia”--meaning good place, and “outpia”--meaning no place (Abrams 320). The utopia is, in fact, a pun, an ambiguous term resulting in a plethora of definitions. According to M.H. Abrams, a utopia is a “class of fictional writing that represents an idea, non-existent political and social way of life” (Abrams 320). Martin G. Plattel in his work *Utopia and Critical Thinking* proposes that “the utopian searches of happiness dream of new earthly paradise, in which an authentic freedom reigns and happiness is sought in unbridled sensuous delight” (47). Martin Parker in his study “Utopia and the Organisational Imagination: Eutopia” emphasizes more on the social structure of utopian state when he defines utopia as a “systematic investigation of alternative principles of organisation” that “relies on a reformation of the principles of social order” (217). However, these definitions highlight the same idea of an imaginary society with an impeccable socio-economic and political system.

The chief reason for the origins of the utopian genre is given by Plattel who opines that “the dream of utopia with paradise-like conditions is always unconsciously present in our psyche since the original paradise of the Garden of Eden where man lives in perfect



harmony with nature and himself" (46-47). But this utopian dream does not seem to materialize as human existence and subsistence exclusively depends on nature. Hence, humans "afflicted by the memory of the lost paradise are constantly trying to revive and recreate it" (Plattel 47). This process of reviewing and recreating lost paradise emerged as the utopian concept in the realm of literature.

The term dystopia depicts a world in which everything is imperfect and everything has gone terribly wrong. The word "dystopia" is translated from Greek for "bad place" (Abrams 321). In fact, dystopia is a future world that satirises and distorts modern issues into an inexhaustible and dehumanized state in which control have been forced upon the society and its citizens through social and physical limitations that restrict many aspects of life. Thus, dystopian literature is the off shoot of speculative fiction that depict a society with hypothetical situations "to motivate a generation on the cusp of adulthood" (Cart 103). Many dystopian worlds are established on utopian ideologies that seems to have perfect social and political order but, in reality, leaves only a few people in control of society.

### **The Depiction of Dehumanization in Lois Lowry's *The Giver***

*The Giver* is a narrative of an eleven years old boy named Jonas living in a futuristic society that has eliminated pain, fear, war, bitterness and hatred. The society is ruled by a totalitarian regime named Community of Elders who enjoys administrative as well as legislative power in the country. At inception, Lois Lowry's *The Giver* seems a utopian novel; however, with the elapse of time it turns a dystopian novel. Jonas, the protagonist of the text, lives in a society where life is heavily regimented and everything is the same in colour. The society undergoes a massive transformation schemed by the regime long ago. The regime names the plan the Concept of Sameness. Under this plan, government controls the weather, removes the mountains, bans sexual intimacy even between spouses and effaces words like "love," "puberty," "colour," etc. that government thinks are unnecessary in the regime. People under the regime are conditioned through genetic engineering in such a way that they are not only blind to colours but also incapable of suspecting the credibility of Community of Elders. The regime succeeds in eliminating miseries like poverty, hunger, etc. from its social fabric. However, in the process, it relinquishes so many things along with it like colours, seasons, love, compassion, etc. that triggers dehumanization of people of this state. The dehumanization of citizens in *The Giver* can be succinctly analyzed on three levels: elimination of choice, repression of emotions and termination of life.

### **Elimination of Choice**

The totalitarian regime in *The Giver* subtly oppresses its subjects to retain its control over state affairs. However, oppression whether overt or covert engenders dehumanization. One aspect of oppression that causes dehumanization of people in *The Giver* is that the totalitarian regime makes all choices for its subjects. Hardly any free choice is possible. The regime distributes clothes among its citizens according to age and gender that are identical for everybody in each category. Oscar Wilde in his work *The Soul of Man under Socialism* states that "Every man must be left quite free to choose his own work. No form of compulsion must be exercised over him" (30). However, in the society of *The Giver*, it is not so. Jobs are assigned to each member as soon as they turn twelve. The regime assigns jobs on the basis of the tendency of children that the regime ascertains by thoroughly examining the inclination of children during their recreational hours. Not only this, spouses and children

are also assigned. Each family unit must have one girl and one boy. However, it is worthy to mention that the families are not biological family units of which most people are cognizant of but just an ordering system whereby people are assembled and tied into family clusters. Spouses don't indulge in intimate relationships as sex is an unknown phenomenon. The regime does not "dare to let make people their own choices . . . [they] really have to protect people from wrong choices" (Lowry 124). The regime's decision to deprive people of their own choice is dehumanizing for several reasons. First, it prevents people from expressing themselves through their choices and restrains them from being able to demonstrate their uniqueness. In addition, by this process, the regime underestimates the capacity of its citizens for rational thinking and judgment. In other words, the regime does not consider its citizen rational beings who have efficacy to decide correctly for their own at all. Moreover, it results in the loss of agency on the part of citizens because citizens are continuously dependent on the judgment of others. When a person is bereft of his agency, he automatically loses his personal identity as well. In his reflection of dehumanization, Herbert Kelman defines personal identity as: "To accord a person identity is to perceive him as an individual independent and distinguishable from others, capable of making choices, and entitled to live his own life on the basis of his own goals and values" (48). However, in the totalitarian regime the citizens do not have an intrinsic identity like to choose things by their own volition but have some extrinsic identity ascribed to them by the regime in the form of jobs and family units.

People are not entitled to live as they see fit rather they are forced to comply with the rules and regulations of the regime. Author Madeline L'Engle describes oppression by arguing that "To take away a man's freedom of choice, is to manipulate him as though he were a puppet and not a person" (202). Though in any civilized society some personal freedom must be sacrificed for greater goal is comprehensible but with the profundity it transpires in *The Giver* is unquestionably resulting in dehumanization.

### **Repression of Emotions**

Emotions or feelings are an integral part of human beings. Emotions and feelings enable people to experience pleasure, pain, love, hate, bias, anger etc. However, feelings and emotions are not the part of human life in *The Giver*. The regime has not only deprived its subjects of these innate characteristics but also devoid the state-sanctioned dictionary from these words.

No sooner an individual reaches its puberty in the regime than medicines are prescribed to him to do away with the sexual arousal. According to the regime, sexual arousal is a disease named "stirrings" that needs medication prescribed in the form of pills. These pills are suppressants that not only repress sexual desire but also other deep feelings. When Jonas stops taking the pills, the "stirrings" return and he feels slightly guilty but he decides not "to go back to the world of no feelings that he had lived in so long" (Lowry 164). Jonas knows that taking the pill means to return to the subhuman state he used to live in.

Another way feelings of the people are subdued is through the removal of memories. Although pain and grief have been taken away from them, so have joy and love.

As Jonas receives more and more memories from The Giver, he becomes aware of everything that he never felt before. Lowry mentions: "Jonas realized that it was a new depth of feelings that he was experiencing . . . Though he knows that his failure to take the pills accounted for some of it, he thought that feelings came also from the memories (164-165).

Feelings take Jonas to the world that no one else in his community except The Giver experiences. The others who take pills and do not possess memories, sense, shallow and mild feelings. In other words, the diminished version of the feelings that Jonas is now cognizant of. Instead of anger, they feel frustration, instead of love they "enjoy" the presence of a person and instead of anguish they feel limited concern. Hence, the vibrancy and depth of life of all the citizenry except Jonas and The Giver is severely diminished, as none of their feelings go beyond the surface level. Moreover, every morning and evening the members of each family unit have to share their dreams and feelings with one another. This calm discussion and deconstruction of their feelings removes any true depth and meaning they could have had.

### **Termination of Life**

Every human being has not only the right to live but to live his life as good as possible. Thus, it is universally forbidden to take one's life. Killing is one of the despicable acts because it takes one's right to live. However, in *The Giver* the life of an individual is taken away against his will and is euphemistically called release. The community assigns some of its members to release old people. The assigners are well trained so that they will not feel saddened while releasing people. The regime tells people that release is one of the essential parts of life. Hence, people who are released even do not refuse and accept the decision of the regime wholeheartedly. For instance, when Jonas asks Larissa, an old woman who has just attended the releasing ceremony of Roberto, about the place where released people are sent. She responds: "I don't know. I don't think anybody does, except the committee. [Roberto] just bowed to all of us and then walked, like they all do, through the special door in the Releasing Room. But you have seen his look. Pure happiness, I'd call it." From Larissa's explanation, it can be argued that actually, the people of the community do not know what release is, what happens to them after being released, and where will they go after being released. Instead of feeling sad that they will never return to the community again, the people who are being released look very happy. They even make a lovely goodbye speech. In addition, a large number of people gather to attend the releasing ceremony of a person to celebrate it. Though the citizens do not know the meaning of release, yet they never ask the regime what release exactly means. They comply with the policy of the regime blindly without feeling the need to ask the regime where released people are actually sent. The citizens seem contented that the rule is very essential without which the community cannot function smoothly. People who are released never return back to the community because they are killed by the regime. However, people are told that released people are sent to another place and the people believe it.

This is not only the case of old people even children are not spared if they do not

conform to the regime's strict rules. For instance, Jonas' father, a nurturer, kills an infantile by poisoning him in a releasing ceremony. Jonas watches the ceremony from The Giver's screen when "his father began very carefully direct the needle into the top of new child's forehead, puncturing the place where the fragile skin pulsed. The newborn squirmed and wailed" (Lowry 187). On watching this shocking truth, Jonas cried "He killed it! My father killed it" (Lowry 188). The fault of this of this child is that it is underweight means its weight is lesser than the prescribed weight of the regime. Appalled and shocked at what he has seen, Jonas tells The Giver that this is no ceremony. It is death! The compassionate Giver tries to console the young man, explaining that these people in the community who carry out the death procedures and those who condone it, don't really fathom what they are doing. They just don't know any better and have been conditioned to accept it.

That night Jonas cannot sleep at all. He orchestrates a strategy to liberate himself as well as his people from the dehumanized state. There is only one way to achieve this objective; that is if he furtively succeeds in crossing the border of the community. His predecessor had told him that as soon as "he moved away from the community, he would shed the memories and leave them behind for the people" (Lowry 211). Thus, everyone in the community would become aware of the previous discourse. As a result, people will automatically overthrow the totalitarian regime. Though at the end a reader remains in the dark about the future of Jonas as well as his community. However, the last images of the novel are optimistic if inconclusive. Jonas seems to have an intuition that he heard music coming "across vast distances of space of time, from the place he had left" (Lowry 180). Thus, it indicates that the community he leaves behind has gone through some positive change.

## Conclusion

When in any society people are oppressed, it triggers dehumanization. People are not only dehumanized by subjecting them to physical or mental torture but also depriving them from the innate attributes that distinguish them from the rest of animal kingdom. Thus, dehumanization is quite often not denotative but connotative in its operationalization. It subliminally functions in the society by conditioning the mind of common people in such a way that they condone every move of the ruling power. Thus, common people lost the capacity to think which in turn results into the loss of their agency and subsequently, causes their dehumanisation. Dehumanization is depicted in the selected text as a bilateral process in which both oppressed and oppressor become its victim. The former is categorized in animalistic dehumanization because he is not considered a human being at all and is relegated to the stature of a subhuman. Whereas, the later falls in the category of mechanic dehumanization because he fails to extend humanness and compassion to his fellow beings.

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## Gender, Norm and Disability: A Critical Study of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Birthmark*

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### Abstract

*Norms permeate every sphere of a society. In fact they underpin the value system of a particular society and are indispensable to its overall setup. Inevitably the notion of the collective and individual identity of a society presupposes that the presence of such norms bring to the fore contested ideas of normal or normality. The same societal norms govern beauty ideals, thereby rendering it a socially constructed phenomenon. In the present short story The Birthmark by Nathaniel Hawthorn, the protagonist and husband Aylmer is fixated on the removal of a harmless birthmark on his wife Georgiana's face which in his view was a corrigible 'disability', a blot on her beauty. His anxiety to erase this imperfection stems from his skewed notions of beauty, ideal, ideal human body etc. This paper thus seeks to investigate and debate the concepts of norm, normal, ideal, disability, perfection, ideal body etc. in view of unfolding of events in the story under consideration which ultimately lead to tragic demise of Georgiana.*

*Keywords: Norm, Normal, Ideal, Ideal Body, Birthmark, Disability, Gender, Perfection.*

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Nathaniel Hawthorne (July 4, 1804 - May 19, 1864) was an acclaimed American novelist, and the author of short stories. His works usually portray human follies and sins which ultimately bring devastation in their wake and his short stories, in particular, often have moral messages accompanied by deep psychological underpinnings. Here, his current short story, *The Birthmark*, first published in March 1843, revolves around the protagonist Georgiana who had a birthmark upon her cheek. Her husband Aylmer pressured her to have it removed. So much so that he developed an obsession with the mark being a symbol of imperfection or much worse a 'disability'. This strengthens the stereotype that women need to attach importance to their external appearance only. And when something is 'out of place' regarding their body, it immediately calls for adjustment. Here Georgiana feels the heat of societal pressure centered on perfect body image. But, this obsession with beauty is a socially constructed phenomenon. Reality is that the societal norms govern beauty ideals. These norms, in turn, don't exist in vacuum. In fact they are grounded in value system of a particular society, indispensable to its overall setup. Logically the notion of the collective identity of a /society presupposes the presence of such norms which govern its material as well as spiritual makeup. Not surprisingly, the idea of normal or normality springs from the concept of norms. Leonard Davis in *Disability Studies Reader* excellently captures the ubiquity of norms,

We live in a world of norms. Each of us endeavors to be normal or else deliberately tries to avoid that state. We consider what the average person does, thinks, earns, or consumes. We rank our intelligence, our cholesterol level, our weight, height, sex drive, bodily dimensions along some conceptual line from subnormal to above-average. We consume a

minimum daily balance of vitamins and nutrients based on what an average human should consume...There is probably no area of contemporary life in which some idea of a norm, mean, or average has not been calculated. (1)

In the same vein, the significance of gender norms like other societal norms is viewed as several concerns of debate on 'normality'. According to the social constructionist feminist theory, the ideal body standards that females of society are meant to observe are the product of society's gender ideology, practices, and patriarchal system. Interestingly, the ideals of beauty and female body image witness a shift from time to time, depending on matrix of social norms and social interactions. In the story under consideration, Aylmer is totally convinced about futility of the birthmark and even tries to sow the seeds of skepticism in Georgiana's mind, "Georgiana", said he, "has it never occurred to you that the mark upon your cheek might be removed" (Hawthorne 10)? He considers it a defect of her otherwise ideal beauty. He affirms that "No, dearest Georgiana, you came so nearly perfect from the hand of Nature that this slightest possible defect, which we hesitate whether to term a defect or a beauty, shocks me, as being the visible mark of earthly imperfection" (Hawthorne 10).

This male notion of misplaced beauty ideal was readily absorbed and internalized by Georgiana who caters to the view of Simone De Beauvoir that a woman's imagination of her body is not divorced from male's conception of the same. In fact a young girl and then the woman experiences her body *under the gaze of others*. According to Simone in her book *The Second Sex*, "Through compliments and admonishments, through images and words, she discovers the meaning of the words pretty and ugly; she soon knows that to be pleased is to be pretty as a picture; she tries to resemble an image, she disguises herself, she looks at herself in the mirror, she compares herself to princesses and fairies from tales" (304). In the same vein, Dworkin says, "In our culture not one part of a women's body is left untouched, unaltered... From head to toe, every feature of a woman's face, every section of her body, is subject to modification" (113-14). Hence, the burden of aesthetics lies solely on the nubile shoulders of the female as affirmed by the Australian feminist writer Germaine Greer in her book *The Female Eunuch*, "To her belongs all that is beautiful, she is a doll...I'm sick of the masquerade..." (55).

Essentially the 'male gaze' becomes the ultimate determinant factor in the creation of female image. Laura Mulvey in her article also argues that the concept of male gaze finds resonance with Lacanian argument that feminism and femininity are merely social constructs like concepts of norm, normal, disability (44). This narrow perception depicts a woman as 'she', or in other words a 'problem', which is symptomatic of the emerging politics of post-feminist inquiry (Bodies, 34). Such an argument further gives credence to the view that there exists an unbalanced power relationship between viewer or male and 'viewed' or female, or to say between gazer and the gazed and, therefore, leading to objectification of female fraternity (Bodies, 38). The concept of identity is further elaborated by Judith, according to her, Identity as a notion is an illusion created by our performances: "In opposition to theatrical or phenomenological models which take the gendered self to be

prior to its acts, I will understand constituting acts not only as constituting the identity of the actor, but as constituting that identity as a compelling illusion, an object of belief" ("Performative" 271). Moreover such unwavering faith in categories of identities and gender differences is, in fact, driven by social sanction. One effect of such categorizations is also the creation and reinforcement of that which cannot be articulated, "a domain of unthinkable, abject, unlivable bodies" (Bodies 26). Butler further employs the question of 'abjected domain' to question and "rearticulate the very terms of symbolic legitimacy and intelligibility" (Bodies 3). It is this status quo based on the premise of vague, manufactured, and performative nature of gender identity that Butler seeks to question. In the present story *Birthmark*, Hawthorne's protagonists Georgiana and her husband Aylmer confirm to Butler's mould of contested and artificial categories of identities so far as the burden of 'perfect gender image' is foisted on Georgiana by the society.

Not only Aylmer but also the society at large was divided in its reaction to Georgiana's birthmark. Some viewed it as mark of beauty, while others despised it as a fatal flaw. Even at one point of time Aylmer considered it as 'the symbol of his wife's liability to sin, sorrow, decay, and death. His 'sombre imagination' rendered the birthmark a 'frightful object, causing him more trouble and horror than ever Georgiana's beauty, whether of soul or sense, had given him delight'(12). The people surrounding Georgiana are in always in a fix on how to judge her blemish. Some believe that it is a part of her earthly existence, while others believe she would be a better person without it. The 'mysterious hand' imbibes a potentially equal version of both good and bad. The good part concerns the uniqueness which the birthmark instills in her; it serves as an addition to her beautiful facial symmetry and in the process sends out the vibes of positivity of a different kind. The bad part is the connotations of evil, something ominous that resides on her face. Hawthorne's story reads,

Georgiana's lovers were wont to say that some fairy at her birth hour had laid her tiny hand upon the infant's cheek, and left this impress there in token of the magic endowments that were to give her such sway over all hearts...Some fastidious persons – but they were exclusively of her own sex – affirmed that the bloody hand, as they chose to call it, quite destroyed the effect of Georgiana's beauty, and rendered her countenance even hideous. (Hawthorne 11)

*The Birthmark* by Nathaniel Hawthorne thus raises complex questions about disability and its implications. This wonderful work of fiction seeks to question the immortal questions of disability as imperfection and of ridding society of this purported burden. Here, the same norms of society view the birthmark of Georgiana as an anomaly or worst a disability which warrants immediate redressal. Davis says "The word normal as constituting, conforming to, not deviating or different from, the common type or standard, regular, usual only enters the English language around 1840" (*Enforcing* 1). The concept of a norm, unlike that of an ideal, implies that the majority of the population must or should somehow be part of the norm...So, with the concept of the norm comes the concept of deviations or extremes (*Enforcing* 3). Leonard J. Davis has also thrown some light on the concept of 'normal'. According to him "normal was preceded by the concept of the 'ideal' and the idea of 'ideal' envisages a mytho-poetic body that is linked to that of the gods" (*Enforcing* 3). He further elaborates:



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

As hinted above, the concept of 'norm' is juxtaposed with the concept of deviations. Because when we think of bodies in a society where the concept of 'norm' is operative then people with disabilities are generally thought of as deviants. So logically, the concept of disabled body, too, has been predicated on the premise of the normal body. Moreover, the norms or parameters that govern what constitutes 'normal' or 'normality' are essentially the products of social discourse. As a result the standards of 'normal', 'normality' witness a shift over time and space. Similarly the problem of defining 'normal', 'normality' extends to the concept of disability also which is understood with different meanings in different communities and thus escapes a universal definition. The current story directly or indirectly puts into spotlight society's views and questions on disability. It poses the valid question -Is disability integral to a person's mortal existence or is it an avoidable burden? Because 'disability' is a contested concept, with different meanings in different communities, various models of disability tend to explain the elusive phenomenon, e.g. the medical model views that disability may be used to refer to physical or mental incongruities that need to be fixed. On the other hand, the moral/religious model of disability regards disability as a punishment from God for a particular sin or sins that may have been committed by the person with disability while the social model ignores how grave a person's impairment is and shifts the emphasis from personal inadequacy or 'abnormality' to physical and societal (legal, cultural, and attitudinal) barriers experienced by a person with impairment. i.e. it refers to the limitations imposed on people by the constraints of an ableist society (the social model). Aylmer believes it to be a medical anomaly by considering, "I am convinced of the perfect practicability of its removal" (Hawthorne 21). For him, Georgiana's birthmark makes her less than a human and hence damages her reputation in the society as an individual. His obsession with getting rid of it speaks to the part of society that believes disability to be a burden, an inconvenience, and essentially a hellish entity. Aylmer's anxiety to erase this facial anomaly from their lives using the scientific knowledge and resources at his command speaks volume about presence of the medical view of disability in the current story. Whereas on the other hand, the society's varied reactions to the birthmark makes it appear like a liability. More so, though there is immense danger involved in an experiment like this, he is convinced that the risk is worth the potential reward and gets successful in securing Georgiana's trust driven partially by some misplaced notion of disability and partially surrendering to 'weak gender' syndrome. It drives her to say,

"If there be the remotest possibility of it," continued Georgiana, "let the attempt be made at whatever risk. Danger is nothing to me; for life, while this hateful mark makes me the object of your horror and disgust,— life is a burden which I would fling down with joy. Either remove this dreadful hand, or take my wretched life! You have deep science. All the world bears witness of it. You have achieved great wonders. Cannot you remove this little, little mark, which I cover with the tips of two small fingers? Is this beyond your power, for the

sake of your own peace, and to save your poor wife from madness?" (Hawthorne 15)

With each passing day Aylmer's discontent with the mark grows from strength to strength. This dissatisfaction culminates into abomination for this harmless entity and he becomes selfish and irrational to the extent where he would rather see her die than see her live with what he views to be a disability. When Georgiana shows the signs of faltering, 'Cried he, impetuously. "Would you throw the blight of that fatal birthmark over my labors? It is not well done. Go, prying woman, go!"' (Hawthorne 23). Aylmer's anxiety to eliminate this Godly mistake is boosted by his misplaced belief in his scientific abilities and explorations. The irony lies in the fact that whereas Aylmer treated the mark as his wife's undesirable characteristic, something abetting to 'inhuman' in his wife's persona, the same scientist considered it perfectly human to put his wife through this dangerous exercise. Ultimately, his obsession with creating the perfect woman in his wife kills her, and the discovery that perfection is unattainable and perhaps even an emotional illusion is profound. "Drink, then, thou lofty creature!" exclaimed Aylmer, with fervid admiration. "There is no taint of imperfection on thy spirit. Thy sensible frame, too, shall soon be all perfect" (Hawthorne 31). With the administration of the potion by his lab assistant Aminadab, the 'mad' scientist reached the culmination of his senseless efforts, not knowing even an inch that the birthmark was integral to her whole makeup not a physical aberration. The rhythm of her every breath was essentially linked to that of the birthmark. "She remained not less pale than ever; but the birthmark with every breath that came and went, lost somewhat of its former distinctness. Its presence had been awful; its departure was more awful still." (Hawthorne 34). The so-called mark of disability started growing pale with ingestion of the 'magical drink' by Georgiana but the uninvited and lethal consequences of this scientific goof-up saw her becoming paler and paler with each passing moment. The smug and foolish Aylmer stood gloating over his scientific 'success' exclaims, "By Heaven! it is well-nigh gone!" said Aylmer to himself, in almost irrepressible ecstasy. "I can scarcely trace it now. Success! success! And now it is like the faintest rose color. The lightest flush of blood across her cheek would overcome it. But she is so pale!" ... "My peerless bride, it is successful! You are perfect!" (Hawthorne 38).

But to Aylmer's horrible dismay, Georgiana died leaving all the false pretences of image, beauty etc. for Aylmer and the society at large to ponder over. Aylmer's chase of perfect or ideal human body seen in context of prevailing societal ideology of gender and feminine beauty came staggering to a deadly end. The tragic end of Georgiana happened because "he failed to look beyond the shadowy scope of time, and, living once for all in eternity, to find the perfect future in the present" (Hawthorne 40). Her demise is a grim reminder about how the innocuous-looking rigid notions of norms, normality and disability when observed with a fanatic pursuit, can wreak havoc in human lives. In fact, the concepts of beauty, disability get defined and redefined over the course of time. Nathaniel, in this illuminating short story, very reasonably brings under scanner the entrenched notion of normality and beauty so that the rigidity of our perceptions of beauty, ugliness, perfect, and imperfect can be reconsidered, especially in context of gender debate where the applications of rigid standards of body norms of beauty and perfect image prove double whammy for the fairer sex. Undeniably, times have changed since this story was written and our cultural constructs of beauty and disability have evolved a great deal. However, the

evolutionary process still persists.

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## Cultural Imperialism in Native-American Fiction: A Critique of Sherman Alexie's *Indian Killer*

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### *Abstract*

*Native-Americans have a distinct indigenous culture which oppressive, mainstream white culture failed to assimilate. Oppression has proved counter-productive for the colonizers. Native-Americans are even today maintaining their specific culture. The present paper analyzes the efforts of Native-American fiction writer, Sherman Alexie for the authentic portrayal of Native culture, which provided an impetus to the indigenous people to reject the oppression and hegemony of the New Order. Schiller's theory of cultural imperialism serves as the theoretical and methodological framework for the analysis of Alexie's *The Indian Killer* to highlight the impact of socio-economic and cultural changes and the insight of the Native-American writers for the survival of their culture. It lays bare the imperial designs of the oppressive forces on the one hand, and anti-imperialistic efforts of the oppressed for their emancipation on the other, thereby inferring that the white hegemonic culture with all its power failed to assimilate in it the Native-American culture as the Native-Americans resisted and rejected the white cultural imperialism successfully.*

*Keywords: Culture, Imperialism, oppression, hegemony. Anti-imperialism, emancipation*

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### **Introduction**

Foreigners with dominant power come to a territory, observe the local population and after careful analysis of their strengths and weaknesses invade the territory and conquer it. After this conquest, they become the ruling masters and start enforcement of their own system of government and their own ideology. This process is called imperialism. Imperialist powers or states start their practices in three ways. First of all, they take political activities of the subdued states in their hands so the first kind of imperialism is political imperialism. Secondly, they control the economy of the state and all sources of production, in this way, the second form of imperialism is economic imperialism and as politics and economy of any state are directly linked with the people of the state, so they are deeply influenced by these acts. They are impressed by their habits of daily life, their language and their means of communication through media. This levelling of the opinion of the people

affects their culture as well and in this way, it becomes cultural imperialism. Cultural imperialism is evidently practised in all those parts of the world which have remained at one time or the other, under colonial rule.

As Raymond Williams says, "Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language. . . . *Colere* had a range of meanings: inhabit, cultivate, protect, honour with worship" (Williams 1983& 2015). It has a large number of denotative and connotative interpretations and from such interpretations, one is 'to colonize.' Culture has various kinds. A few examples are corporate culture, which deals with the official life of any community or company. Marketization and production of marketable goods and catching the attention of the public towards these goods through the use of specific attitudes, values and attractive incentives etc. enhance the impact of this type of culture. Popular culture comprises the acts of common masses living and practising certain rituals, values, customs and other activities. The vast majority of the public is in bond with the nation through this kind of culture, mostly controlled by popular media trends. Information culture is one of the most effective weapons to introduce this popular culture according to the will of the powerful state actors. Foreign culture is also a kind of cultural diversity in which a person observes and is attracted towards the culture of a foreign social group either within the country or outside of it. All these kinds of cultures are intertwined and intermingled . Broadly speaking there are only two types of culture, material or non-material, real or ideal. Real or material culture comprises buildings, institutions, human beings, books and other real structures which means that all tangible things are part of real or material culture and non-material or ideal culture comprises all non-tangible things like emotions, words, relationships of love or hatred. The most interesting thing is that they are not separable from one and the other. For example, man is material and words spoken by him are non-material, radio is material and its sound is non-material. School is material but education is non-material.

In brief, cultures have a physical existence and a related ideology. When a stronger nation subjugates a weaker one, it not only occupies its physical cultural existence rather its ideology too. Cultural imperialism pierces through each and every weakness of the oppressed nation. Sometimes this oppression is taken for granted and is accepted as a positive progression as the biggest claim of all colonizing nations was to 'civilize the brutes' which was a pretext to destroy the existing order and impose a new order in the colonized territories. Most often this change was and even today is resisted and challenged through praxis as well as ideological discourse.

### **Methodology**

Herbert Schiller, regarded as the founder of the theory of cultural Imperialism, has criticized America for spreading its dominance over the other weaker countries of the world. He coined the term 'packaged consciousness' and is of the view that American media is under the hegemonic control of a few capitalist corporations which control the belief system, values and information throughout the world. This is true for the indigenous minorities also. So capital and imperialism are directly connected with each other. He says in *Culture Inc.* (1991), "The consolidation of power of big business was accomplished in a

number of ways . . . the use of anti-communism to control labour as well as divert the general public from the expansionist policy of American business” (13). This consolidation of economic power is underpinned by a number of variables which are further stated by him in the words as, “the adoption of new farm technologies which increased output at the same time as it eliminated a good part of the independent farm population; the influx of a conservative immigrant stream; the spread of depoliticized living space; and twenty years of relative prosperity . . . (13-14).

He further establishes the relationship of material sources of production with those of symbolic goods and services in the words as “These [second tier] activities also provide symbolic goods and services . . . [and] are displayed in relatively permanent installations, instead of being produced serially. Using this measure, museums, art galleries, amusement parks, shopping malls, and corporate “public spaces” also function as cultural industries” (30-31). So he relates to culture and industry by creating a relationship between mass media and culture. In his view culture is also an industry and information is socially constructed. Thus, information also becomes a source of cultural domination. He says that the domination of capital over the market forces is a source of cultural and social domination. To quote him: “Whatever the unique experiential history of each of the many subgroups in the nation, they are all subject to the rule of market forces and the domination of capital over those market forces. This is the grand common denominator that ensures basic inequality in the social order” (153). In his opinion the capital forces have control over media which in turn controls culture and thus it assumes the shape of cultural imperialism which is astonishing and remarkable for him.

[T]he presence of giantism and concentrated control in the media and allied cultural fields, though hardly a secret, now seems perfectly reasonable to most Americans – and certainly no cause for anxiety. The extent to which the public has been programmed to accept these conditions in the media, and in the economy overall, is remarkable (40).

Schiller further states that information companies are also like private business centres where profit-making is the sole objective. The difference is only that these centres are computer-driven:.

Information companies are not different than private firms in other sectors in their single-minded objective to engage in a profitable enterprise. In the information field, they advocate and promote a private and commercial context for outputs that either derives from or can be utilized by a computer-driven society (72).

It indicates that there is a strong relationship of culture, imperialism, media and politics and history or dialectics of materialism. These principles set by Schiller can very aptly be applied to the socio-political, economic and cultural condition of the Native Americans, who are under the oppression of the powerful white domination. In *Communication and Cultural Domination*, Schiller described cultural imperialism as “the sum of processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum

is attracted, pressured, forced, and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominant center of the system" (9, 1984)

## II

Native Americans are the pre-historic inhabitants of the land, called the USA, but they were dispossessed of their mother earth through brutal force by the followers of Columbus, who in pursuit of riches reached the territory rich in natural resources. The invaders who came to their virgin territory professedly to civilize the inhabitants, began to oppress and hegemonize the native population by their physical liquidation and usurping the land, thus reducing resistance. They were made captives on one pretext or the other, forced to move to the reservations by dislocating them where there were scanty chances of survival because of the lack of natural resources. A number of "fatal diseases were introduced which wiped away a large population of Native Americans as they had no immunity against such diseases" (Fitzgerald 2010). "Linguistic imperialism was practised by the colonists by keeping the Native children away from their indigenous language to eradicate any trace of their original culture" (Palmiste 2008, 79). They were forcibly admitted to the far off boarding schools and mostly were adopted by the issueless white couples who brainwashed them and created hatred in them against their indigenous culture. Native Americans started protests against this brutal treatment and atrocious physical and cultural genocide but they had to surrender to white imperialism as they were rendered powerless to preserve their Native identity as their number started reducing day by day.

These tactics of the colonists worked a little. Through forced assimilation and coercive conversion, they could only reduce the native population but "could not eradicate it and even today it has continued without any change but in the language of the colonizer," says Simon Ortiz (cited in Anderson, 2010). There is no denial of the fact that Native Americans were influenced by the white oppressors and there were drastic changes in their cultural, economic, social, political and historical perspectives. However, "spiritually they are an inseparable entity with their cosmos. They still maintain the traditions of their forefathers and mock at the face of the colonizers" (French 2008).

"We are what, We have lost" (Alexie, 1996)

*Indian Killer* (1996) by Alexie narrates poignantly the tale of the cultural loss of the Native-Americans and the retaliation which is shown by them in order to perpetuate it. John Smith, the protagonist of the novel is an Indian by origin, born in a reservation's basic health unit of a twelve-year-old mother. He is transported stealthily to a far off white inhibited area by the nurse and handed over to an Elite class issueless couple. His birth record is sealed and nobody knows his actual mother and father but on the other hand, his white parents are very much affectionate to him. He, on growing older is not satisfied with his white identity and is desirous of knowing his actual identity. This desire in him turns him a reactionary against this aggression of lost identity and starts violence. He leaves his house and starts working as a labourer to be in contact with the Indian laborers. At the same time, he becomes violent and has become a sign of terror for the white colonists in America. He is suspected to be a serial killer, who beheads the white officers one by one and disappears. Till the end of the novel, he is not detected or arrested because of the exercise of traditional magic of the Native forefathers. He becomes a serial killer because of the hatred which has grown in him with the passage of time.

White imperialism is reflected from the very start of the novel as, John Smith as an infant of a few hours was stolen by a nurse from the hospital and handed over to an issueless white couple to a far off place for monetary benefits of the nurse and the agents. The narrative of the novel goes, "A man in a white jumpsuit steps from the helicopter. Head ducked and body bent, the man runs toward the nurse. His features are hidden inside his white helmet. The nurse meets him halfway and hands him the baby John" (13). These lines reflect the white hegemony over the natives as, even their children were not safe from the aggression, which is a conscious effort of the colonists to demolish the cultural values of the oppressed community. The very important factor of cultural imperialism is a dislocation of manpower and transport of John Smith is proof of this oppressive strategy.

The imperialist masters employ all the stratagems as politics, media and capital to oppress and assimilate the weaker culture. As the story of *Indian Killer* unfolds there are insidious attempts at assimilation to eradicate Indian culture. John Smith's white parents brought him up in somewhat luxurious circumstances and he was baptized as Daniel's wife suggests him, "We need to get John baptized" (19). He was baptized to make him assimilated in the Christian white community but he always wondered why his skin colour was entirely different from his parents and suspected that he was not the real son of the couple. So in order to know his real identity, he became vindictive and started searching for his origin. Not being able to locate his roots he satiated his anger by killing the white. Thus, the practice of oppression became in itself a terrifying activity for them.

Schiller's theory of cultural imperialism faces its litmus test in the *Indian Killer*, specially on two important issues. While we notice how the White oppressed the native culture by various practices of dislocation, the counter-hegemonic stance too seems to be operative. Characters like Smith totally rejected the white hegemonic enterprise and even committed violence in order to protect their own cultural heritage. As the narrative bears out: "The killer simply picked any one of the men in grey suits and followed them from office building to cash machine, from lunchtime restaurant back to an office building" (57). It expresses the unhappiness and nervousness of the White when Smith follows them to make them his prey. "Those grey suits were not happy, yet showed their unhappiness only during moments of weakness. Punching the buttons of a cash-machine that refused to work, yelling at a taxi that had come too close" (57). The killer relishes the situation of the white when he attacks them and kills them. The narrative goes as, "A slight limp in uncomfortable shoes. Eyes closed, head thrown back while waiting for the traffic signal. The slight hesitation before opening a door, the men in grey suits wanted to escape, but their hatred and anger trapped them" (57). It reflects the maltreatment of the white with the native and then in retaliation, the native exactly in accordance with their traditions enjoy the helplessness of these officers who are trapped by their own hatred and anger. The situation is becomes problematic as the cultural oppression of the Native Americans at the hands of the white gets countered by the cultural aggression of the Native Americans.

Through the portrayal of Wilson, Alexie controverts the view that the imperial powers influence the belief and value systems of the oppressed by introducing false notions and ideology as Wilson claims to be an Indian while in reality, he is not. He is a construct introduced by the White imperial power to misguide the Native-American youth. Alexie, in



his narrative, rejects the claims of the writer Wilson, who claims that he has some quantity of Indian blood in his veins and represents the Indian culture in his writings truly and effectively. Alexie's narrative says, "Wilson had never come to understand the social lives of Indians. He did not know that, in the Indian world, there is not the much social difference between a rich Indian and a poor one. Generally speaking, Indian is Indian" (175). He explains the position of the Native Americans who have grown rich by dint of their intellect and hard work that the rich Native-Americans may have married the white women and made friends with them but they do not forget their origin and freely mix with the poor Indians. However, a white cannot mix with the Indians easily because he is teased by the Indians: "A few who gain wealth and power as lawyers, businessmen, artists, or doctors may marry white people and keep only white friends, but Wilson did not understand that the white people who pretend to be Indian are gently teased, ignored, plainly ridiculed, or beaten, depending on their degree of whiteness" (175). This is a rebuttal of the cultural imperialism of the white.

Schiller's theory of Cultural imperialism boomerangs as John Smith has grown dislike for his white parents and has preferred to work as a laborer at the construction site of a skyscraper in Seattle instead of going to college. On one occasion he convinces his Indian girl about his activities in the following words. He emerges as the mouthpiece of Alexie in so far as the deteriorating economic condition of the Native Americans:

(Marie) . . . It's not like we're planning a rebellion. We're just putting food in our cupboards. If eating is rebellious, then I guess we're the biggest rebels out there. Indians are just plain hungry. Not for power. Not for money, for food, for breakfast, lunch, and dinner (90).

A very realistic interpretation of the socio-political and cultural circumstances prevailing in the New Order is given by Alexie in the words which are reflective of the discriminatory behaviour of all the state apparatuses used by the white to eradicate the Indian ideology and physical structures as well:

If you kill a black man, the world is silent. You can hear a garage door opening from twenty blocks away. You can pick up a payphone and only hear the dial tone. Shooting stars sound exactly like the soft laughter of a little girl in Gasworks Park. If you kill a white man, the world erupts with noise: fireworks, sirens, a gavel pounding a desk, the slamming of doors (294).

These words echo Schiller's theory being practiced by the white against the Native-Americans. The quote reflects the presence of cultural hegemony of the white in the Americas, where there are different responses to the same treatment meted out to the blacks, the whites and the red Indians. By highlighting this dichotomy in the behavior of the white, the writer calls for the attention of the world powers for the correction of the dual standards existing there. This once again depicts that Alexie has created his characters which show that cultural aggression is inflicted on them and they refute it in favour of their indigenous culture. The powerful written word creates anger and hatred in the Native

population against the white. John Smith's words are symptomatic:

All the anger in the world has come to my house. It's there in my closet. In my refrigerator, In the water, On the sheets. It's in my clothes. Can you smell it? I can never run away from it. It's in my hair. I can feel it between my teeth. Can you taste it? I hear it all the time. All the time the anger is talking to me. It's the devil. I'm the devil. If I could I'd crawl into a hole if I knew God was in there. Where's the hole? (195).

This confrontation of the white oppression and hegemony on the Native American culture is evident from Marie's statement in Dr Mather's class in the college where she is a student. Dr Mather always tries to eradicate Native American culture from the innocent minds of the young students by a caricature of the Native-American heroes. He is challenged by Marie in the following words:

Dr Mather, if the Ghost Dance worked, there would be no exceptions. All you white people would disappear. All of you. If those dead Indians came back to life, they wouldn't crawl into a sweathouse with you. They wouldn't smoke the pipe with you. They wouldn't go to the movies and munch popcorn with you. They'd kill you. They'd gut you and eat your heart (298).

Counter-hegemonic and counter-imperialist strain in *Indian Killer* is vividly reflected in the last chapter of the novel, titled "A Creation Story" which suggests that the killer is still alive and in the final scene, he plays the Ghost Dance which reflects the rejection of the white culture and return to the indigenous culture. His energy increases as more and more Indians join the dance—a dance which, if successful, will smash the white men totally. In the end, the killer isn't only a single person or an individual rather is the 'spirit' of the injustice, terror and violence inflicted on Indians from the onset of colonization. That spirit, the book posits, is immortal and will go on immersing once and again until the purpose of the Ghost Dance is realized. The whole chapter is metaphorically a rebuttal to the white oppression and hegemony and a way to revitalize the native-American culture through their belief that only Ghost dance can mitigate the harms done to them by the whites. Alexie has effectively demonstrated the significance of the Indian rituals through the creation of the character of John Smith. The writer has consciously tried to revert the assimilation policy of the colonizers by showing that as much it was tried by the colonizers to eradicate the native-American culture by this unholy strategy as much the resistance against it was faced by them and more forcefully such assimilated Indians have returned to their original culture. The representation of the authentic native culture by Alexie is a step towards the reconstruction of their indigenous culture and power of their rituals, customs and traditions.

## Conclusion

Doubtlessly Alexie emerges as a true representative of Native American culture by

his rejection of all the imperialistic designs of the white against his indigenous culture. Through a powerful and convincing narrative he has shown his characters as true Indians who nullify the assimilation policies of the white and assert their Indianness and resistance against the cruel, unfair white imperialism and oppression.

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## Representation of Trauma in a Narrative: A Study in Relation to Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

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### *Abstract*

*By exploring the arguments about trauma and narrative, this paper conducts a close analysis of representation of trauma in the narrative of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, through which it could be argued that the relation between trauma and narrative is paradoxical and that narrative becomes an essential tool both for 'working through' and 'acting out'. Further, it could be used to create an unauthentic description of the event(s), either deliberately or coincidentally. The novel selected for the analysis concerns about trauma and narrative as the protagonist, Sethe, is shown suffering from the effect of trauma, and hence, tries to evade it by creating falsifying version of the experiences through which she gets a means of interpreting the events that allows her to 'work through' and 'act out'. As a result, by utilizing the narrative technique, the novelist provides the readers an opportunity to discover the hermeneutic of sufferings, and thus supports the contemporary concern about trauma and narrative.*

*Keyword: Morrison, Trauma, Working- Through, Acting-out, infanticide*

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After the establishment of trauma theory, developed by Cathy Caruth through her work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, published in 1996, in which Caruth defines trauma as “an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (Caruth 11), many critics make a difference between these two terms “acting out” and “working through” – initially derived from Freudian terms of “melancholia” and “mourning”. They are further developed by Dominick LaCapra in his *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001) – to provide an approach to literature dealing with trauma. He developed the notion of “acting out” and “working through” from the essay “Melancholia and Mourning” (1917) by Sigmund Freud in which Freud differentiated these two terms by arguing that 'mourning' and 'melancholia' are similar but different responses to loss. In the essay, Freud has considered 'mourning' as a healthy process of grieving for loss which happens through the conscious mind, whereas 'melancholia' is considered pathological since it happens through the unconscious mind.

According to LaCapra, once a person is traumatized, s/he “acts out” after the traumatic event(s), but while doing so the person is yet to reach a new painful situational experience as well as to experience the emotions associated with it. He argues that 'acting

out' person occasionally re-experiences the event(s) through dreams, flashbacks and hallucinations, and these could be considered an attempt to cope with the experience, and this process happens through the unconscious mind. So, to move on in life, it is considered that a traumatized person should 'work through' his/her trauma consciously.

Further, the situation of 'acting out' could be better understood by the following three ways: Firstly, a traumatized person is likely to re-experience the traumatic event through dreams/nightmares/hallucinations; the second way to acting out a traumatic experience could be the development of multiple identities unconsciously – the condition that is medically called DID or Dissociative Identity Disorder; and the third way is the avoidance of the situation(s)/event(s), the situation in which a victim believes that the event has not affected him/her. This kind of behavior generated the concept of “narrative fetishism” further developed by Eric Santer in his essay “History Beyond the Pleasure Principle” published in 1992. He says:

By narrative fetishism I mean the construction and deployment of a narrative consciously or unconsciously designed to expunge the traces of the trauma or loss that called that narrative into being in the first place. (...) Narrative fetishism (...) is the way an inability or refusal to mourn emplots traumatic events; it is a strategy of undoing, in fantasy, the need for mourning by simulating a condition of intactness, typically by situating the site and origin of loss elsewhere (Santner 144).

LaCapra describes this fact in *Writing History, Writing Trauma* as “fetishized and totalizing narratives that deny the trauma that called them into existence by [...] harmonizing events, and often recuperating the past in terms of uplifting messages or optimistic, self-serving scenarios” (LaCapra 78). To put it in another way, it could be said that a traumatized person through narrative fetishism tries to relate the traumatic event in an optimistic and untruthful way so that the person can make others as well as herself/himself believe that s/he is untouched by the event(s) and hence keeps away the process of working through.

Although the purpose of working through is largely questionable, a historical trauma could be worked through or acted out, wherein acting out is generally considered to be a part of working through and the ultimate ambition of this process is “complete recovery” or “closure”. With regard to the notion of “complete recovery”, Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart have argued in their article “The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma” in Caruth's *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) that it is only possible when “the story can be told, the person can look back at what happened; he has given it a place in his life history, his autobiography, and thereby in the whole of his personality” (van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart 176). In addition to that, Caruth, in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996), says in the context of repetitive post-traumatic dreams that “the return of the traumatic experience in the dream is not the signal of the direct experience but, rather, of the attempt to overcome the fact that it was not direct, to attempt to master what was never fully grasped in the first place” (Caruth 62). On the other hand, in *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001), Dominick LaCapra focuses on

closure:

In recent criticism (with which I agree in part), there has perhaps been too much a tendency to become fixated on the repetition compulsion, to see it as a way to preventing closure, [...] to eliminate or obscure any other possible response, or simply to identify all working through as closure, totalization, full cure, full mastery. The result is a paralyzing kind of all-or-nothing logic in which one is in a double bind: either totalization and the closure you resist, or acting out the repetition compulsion, with almost no other possibilities (LaCapra 145).

Instead of the idea of cure, LaCapra talks about the development of a critical distance from the traumatic past. In an interview to *Yad Vashem*, LaCapra confirms that he views working through as “a kind of countervailing force (to a totally different process, not even something to a cure)”, and that “in the working through, the person tries to gain critical distance on a problem to be able to distinguish between past, present, and future” (LaCapra ). And Kali Tal has supported LaCapra's view in her book *Worlds of Hurt*, as she writes, “[t]rauma is a transformative experience”, and that “those who are transformed can never entirely return to a state of previous innocence” (Tal 119).

*Beloved* (1987) is the fifth novel by Toni Morrison that set up her international reputation. *Beloved* inspects many of the themes that the author has explored in her other novels; hence, *Beloved* also centers on the trauma of slavery in America. And by doing so, Morrison not only explores the trauma of racism in terms of actual physical acts but also connects Sethe's psychological condition, lasting effects of slavery on her mind and her personal sufferings to the wider history of slavery experienced by black communities. But the novel has been analyzed, here, from the perspective of Sethe and the events that traumatized her, as the novel depicts that Sethe's constant attempt to forget her past that, contrary to the expectations, leads her to become possessed by the images of her past life.

Morrison's *Beloved* is structured into three parts. The first part-narrated with fragmented narrated with disoriented thought and delusive references through which the readers come to know about Sethe's traumatic past - describes Sethe's endeavor to deny her past life full of painful experiences. She renounces her traumatic life as a slave at Sweet Home, the place where she is the only woman to live with seven men slaves including her husband, Halle, and Paul D, as she particularly focuses on the fact that Mr. and Mrs. Garner, the owners of the place, treat her well, instead paying heed to the traumatic events she went through when the schoolteacher took the charge of the farm after Mr. Garner's death. The schoolteacher treated the slaves as animals and permitted his nephews to study their animal characteristics. Being terrified by the torture, Sethe and the other slaves determine to flight from their horrific life, but their intention fails. As a result, Sethe is not only dreadfully mistreated by the nephews but also her breast milk is stolen by them. Later, she is again beaten by the nephews that leaves a 'tree' shaped scars on her body, which becomes one of the physical reminders of her past life, as she apprises the incident to Mrs. Garner.

However, Sethe is the only slave who manages to escape, whereas other slaves are either captured or killed. After the escape, she starts living with her mother-in-law, Baby

Suggs, at Cincinnati where she gives birth to Denver and tries to live a normal life and experiences happiness in raising her four children. Unfortunately, Sethe is traced down by the schoolteacher who eventually tries to snatch her children, while, shockingly, Sethe tries to kill all her children; however, she manages to kill only her two-year-old daughter. As a result, she is imprisoned for the act with Denver, her youngest daughter. The killing of her two-year-old daughter is the central traumatic event of the novel. This act of infanticide is indirectly referred to the first part of the novel. Sethe's denial of her past, as well as her action, becomes the sole reason due to which she unintentionally becomes disconnected from the black community that curses her not for her action of infanticide but for her denial to deal with the complex reasons which drove her to kill her own child.

In the second part, wherein the repeated efforts to forget the past is attempted, meanwhile Beloved makes her appearance into her life. Beloved is an enigmatic and contradictory figure that the writer utilizes to present the denial of past. She is the ghost of Sethe's killed baby through which the author not only connects Sethe to her past but also gives her an opportunity to face the forgotten past. The presence of Beloved makes Sethe to be possessed by her past, and along with Denver, she is entrapped within her own house which is 124.

In the third part, discovery of a scar under Beloved's chin at the same place where Sethe cut her own daughter makes Sethe completely believe that Beloved is none other than her killed daughter; hence, the presence of Beloved becomes fearful obsession for Sethe as she starts thinking her presence a threat; therefore, tries her best to explain to Beloved the reason behind killing her baby and eventually imprisons herself in the house. By seeing the condition of her mother, Denver leaves 124 to get help from the community. When Denver seeks aid, the community that made Sethe an outcaste due to her act of infanticide is forced to reconsider their responses to Sethe, and eventually takes the responsibility to cure her from her past that is threatening to consume her. As a result, a crowd of women comes to 124 and starts praying and singing, and Beloved is forcefully driven away. Finally, the community accepts Sethe's act of killing her own daughter as a result of her traumatic past.

The novel begins with an example of Sethe's continuous endeavor to avoid her act of infanticide. The house in which Sethe lives with her daughter, Denver, creates a goose bumps atmosphere as the house is haunted by a ghost believed to be the daughter killed by Sethe. Therefore, Sethe decides to urge in order to explain and "make[...] clear" (Morrison 5) to the ghost the motive why she had taken the decision to kill her own child. However, the decision to face the ghost is to clear the reason of killing and not to confront this trace of the traumatic past, but rather an endeavor to "end the persecution by calling forth the ghost.... [or] an exchange of views or something [that] would help" (Morrison 4). Sethe inclines to send away the very existence of traumatic past from their life. Sethe's mind-set to express the reason of her action of infanticide, in other words, is her desire to simplify the complex motives behind the killing; and it could be better understood through the image of the headstone bought by her for the child's dead body on which the name Beloved is inscribed. However, the name of the child is not uttered throughout in the novel except when the readers come to know through what Sethe says at the funeral. Therefore, the act of naming

her child on the gravestone is the moment when Sethe converts her baby into a representation of what the baby meant to her—that is, nothing but beloved to her, and hence forgetting the real baby and the actuality of the moment when the baby was killed with a saw. This act of forgetting instead of remembering could be better expressed through the argument of Lyotard as it goes, “only that is which has been inscribed can be forgotten, because it could be effaced” (Heidegger 26). To put it another way, Sethe tries to memorialize the act of killing as “on the stillness of her own soul” (Morrison 5). Nevertheless, the narrator has expounded it, “[Sethe] had forgotten the other one: the soul of her baby girl” (Morrison 5). In this regard, it could be argued that monumentalisation of the event is an endeavor to deny the existence of the baby child, and an effort to transform the complex and horrific act of infanticide into a simple and kind act born out of maternal love.

Sethe not only denies her act of infanticide but also disallows her traumatic life as a slave at Sweet Home to resurface. Despite Sethe's rejection of the past, she experiences the disturbing consequence since her present life is shaped by her past life:

Unfortunately her brain was devious. She might be hurrying across a field, running practically, to get to the pump quickly and...Nothing else would be in her mind. The picture of the men coming to nurse her was as lifeless as the nerves in her back where the skin buckled like a washboard. [...] Nothing. Just the breeze cooling her face as she rushed toward water...Then something. The splash of water, the sight of her shoes and stockings awry on the path ....and suddenly there was Sweet Home rolling, rolling, rolling out before her eyes...(Morrison 6).

By rejecting the memories of Sweet Home, Sethe tries to deny her horrific life as a slave, and this leads her to an uncertain response towards the time spent by her at Sweet Home. Sethe's efforts to pacify her traumatic memories have assured that her brain has grown “a greedy child it snatched up everything” (Morrison 83). Her mind is full of images that present static traces of her past; therefore, Sethe all the time tries to ignore them, without letting any occasion for the interpretation. As a result, Sethe becomes unable to prevent her haunting past. She continuously denies her memories that could help her to re-interpret them and that might be helpful in allowing her a possible new life. But for Sethe, past is separate from the present as well as from the future, and the narrator clarifies it as she claims, “To Sethe, the future was a matter of keeping the past at bay” (Morrison 51).

Furthermore, Baby Suggs, Sethe's mother-in-law, also supports Sethe's refusal of the traumatic past rather than force her to confront the traumatic past life. In addition to that, Sethe's and Paul D's relationship is also shaped by the discouragement of same nature from their respective experiences. Having limited their discussion on the selective past, they do try to make a distance from their traumatic experiences; for instance, in their first meeting at 124 when Paul D comes to visit Baby Suggs, both of them try to avoid telling or asking regarding Halle, Sethe's husband. In that conversation when a complex situation arrives, Sethe apprises Paul D, “I wouldn't have to ask about him, would I? You'd tell me if there was anything to tell, wouldn't you?” (Morrison 9). This statement from Sethe is a kind of request not to tell anything that would traumatize her. Nevertheless, Paul D informs Sethe about Halle's break down, after helplessly witnessing Sethe being abused, the cruel



act in which her breast milk was stolen by the schoolteacher's nephews. It is this event that remains more traumatic for her than being beaten up. Although she declines the new information, yet she is terrified with her brain imagining the picture of Halle "squatting by the churn smearing the butter as well as its clabber all over his face because the milk they took is on his mind. And as far as he is concerned, the world may as well know it. And if he was that broken then, then he is also and certainly dead now" (Morrison 83).

In sum, as the traumatic experiences are considered beyond the representation, it could be argued that an effort to narrativize trauma increases the knowledge of understanding the way a narrative can produce a controlled and restricted version of the events. Sethe's denial of her traumatic life causes her to be haunted by the past (as she cannot restore herself except giving it a try) through the visions and memories that she cannot stop to forget as they unexpectedly enter in her mind with an unexpected return of her past like the return of *Beloved*. Due to that reason, Sethe is unable not only to make her future with Paul D but also to connect herself with her community because she denies explaining the reason of killing her own daughter. Further, her denial of the past also becomes the encrypting for her daughter Denver, who is incapable to deal with the complexity of her mother's decision of killing her sister. She also struggles to forget her past in prison with her mother. Sethe kills her daughter not out of maternal love but out of her traumatic past: the past towards which Sethe always responds in the denial mode. Although, after the request from her daughter Denver, her community takes the responsibility to cure her by realizing the reason for infanticide, it could be argued that Sethe could have lived a better life by accepting her past life from the very beginning of her new life after the slavery. And finally, a person can only be free after s/he confronts the past life with all its terrors and dreadful conditions and finds a way to live a new life with the presence of the past and, at the same time, embracing the future.

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## **Body-image and Racial Marginality in Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings***

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### *Abstract*

*Body-image is an aggregation of bodily experiences. The consciousness of body has always been a psychological, cultural and social concern of African American people in America. The African Americans are marginalised in terms of racial discrimination, ideological prejudices and cultural stereotypes. Body-image forms one of the several ways of the individual and communal internalisation of racism and sexism. The present study seeks to explore the relation between body-image and racial marginality. To contextualise this socio-cultural phenomenon, the study evaluates Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969). *Caged Bird* in numerous ways suggests how body-image is closely linked with the cultural education in a community and the social acceptance of the racially marginalised position. To analyse critically how racism interferes with body-consciousness, the study aims to consult the works of philosophers like Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Yancy, and Sartre; feminists like Beauvoir, Spelman, Firestone; cultural historians like Gilman; and Afro-American writers like Gayle, Jr., and Cleaver for their valuable insights of race, body, and consciousness.*

*Keywords: Body-image, Racism, African American, Marginality.*

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### **Introduction:**

Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is an autobiographical narrative about the writer's gradual awareness of her body. The awareness of body is linked to the growth of her individuality and maturity. The story of her individual life is extended to the community by its explicit reference to and involvement of the surrounding people. She projects the growth of an adolescent girl as a common event in the author's perceptual world. The study explores the author's concern with body and the reason behind treating the body as a moral universe of the text.

### **Body-image and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*:**

In the prefatory chapter Maya recalls her childhood self, Marguerite, wearing a lavender taffeta in the church on an Easter morning. Every moment of her being in the dress was a

feeling of embarrassment setting in the event of not recalling an Easter song. The dress turns out to be a metonym of her transformative dream and at the same time a shattering reality. The preface sets the motif of the text, body-consciousness, and the prime concern, body-image.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty uses the term “body-image” in the essay “The Spatiality of One's Own Body and Motility” to mean “a compendium of [our] bodily experience, capable of giving a commentary and meaning to the internal impressions and the impression of possessing a body at any moment” (106). Merleau-Ponty also elaborates some distinctive feature of the notion, body-image: “a continual translation into visual language of the kinaesthetic and articular impressions of the moment”, “dynamic” and “a way of stating that my body is in-the-world” (106-8).

To illustrate the most significant beginning of the eidetic account of life, Angelou commences her autobiography with a childhood day on an Easter Morning in the preface. She has rendered that event an exclusive experience by separating it from chapters to comment on the capacity of her memory to reflect on self, family, and community. On that Easter Morning, Marguerite goes through two awkward incidents. One is the forgetting the Easter prayer and the other is the contrary reception of her wearing a lavender taffeta dress. According to Yolanda M. Manora, “the speech and the scene of the young Maya forgetting her lines during the Easter morning church service” construct “a nostalgic image of the small Southern Black community of which she was a part and about which she writes in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sing*” (Displacement 359). The event is marked by the frustration of a magic trick which is juxtaposed with this act of oblivion. The magic trick here involves the radical transformation of a Negro girl into a movie star: “I knew that once I put on I'd look like a movie star” (*Caged Bird* 7). The trick begins with the making of the dress “as I'd watched Momma put ruffles on the hem and cute little tucks around the waist” (7). Like the movement of sewing machine which grabs the viewers' attention, the dress also diverts the onlooker with its fashion, style, and manufacture. The transformative action originates with the wearer's conviction of its magical properties and culminates in an extraordinary visual mass deception. In other words, the dress contains a magical charm that works with dream, hallucination, and hypnosis. But the dress fails to generate any magical charm and the hallucination breaks in an ugly dream. The ugly dream identifies Marguerite “a too-big Negro girl, with nappy black hair, broad feet, and a space between her teeth that would hold a number two pencil” (8). There is a noticeable link between the act of oblivion and of hallucination. The link is conviction or faith. Here, this loss of faith emanates from the tension between mind and body, between the intelligible and the sensible world. However, Yolanda M. Manora locates the subject-formation within the tension between “the subject in the process of becoming and those external forces that would define the possibilities of her being” (Displacement 360). Here Angelou constructs self in the tension between her body-image and its cultural reception. The dress is not only an outer garment, but also an integral part of her body-consciousness. She writes “each time I breathed it rustled, and now that I was sucking in air to breathe out shame it sounded like crepe paper on the back of hearses” (*Caged Bird* 7). The dress along with her body produces in her a hallucinatory internal impression of the objective physical world. This hallucination, therefore, produces a body-image displaced by its failure to transcend the intelligible world of fashion and

culture.

### **[Em]bodied Identity and Racial Marginality:**

In philosophy, the term “self” emphasises the “inner” or “psychological” dimension of personality (Lowe 816). It is also an umbrella term that incorporates a range of terms denoting 'self-reflective' activity: “consciousness,” “ego,” “soul,” “subject,” “person,” or “moral agent” (Atkins, Introduction 1). Descartes defines subjectivity from the “first person perspective of the self-conscious I” (Atkins, commentary on Descartes 7). Furthermore, in the dictum “*Cogito ergo sum*”, Descartes elevates the status of mind as a locus of human being and characterizes *Cogito* as “nonbodily” and “thinking thing” (8). The Cartesian divide between mind and body and privilege of mind over body also inform gender and racial inferiority. Margrit Shildrick in *Leaky Bodies and Boundaries: Feminism, Postmodernism and (Bio) ethics* argues that “the privileging of the so-called higher faculties...grounds a two-tier system in which women [are] tied...to their bodies...[and] deemed largely incapable of autonomous rational thought” (167). On the other hand, Eldridge Cleaver in the essay “The Primeval Mitosis” demonstrates that in “a society where exists a racial caste system”, “the gulf between the Mind and the Body will seem to coincide with the gulf between the two races” (219-220). Labour is associated with body and if an entire race is visually identified by skin colour and employed to menial tasks, then the race is considered culturally devoid of its rational capacity.

The sexist view of women's inferiority and the racist view of Black people's inferiority are related to each other. In fact, racism is an extension of sexism because in America the hierarchical race-relations resemble the hierarchical nuclear family situating the white man as father, the white woman-wife as the dependent, and the Blacks in a child-like servility to adults (Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex* 108). These hierarchical structures justify their institution by the “meanings” that are commonly “assigned to having a woman's body by male oppressors” and “a black body by white oppressors” (Spelman, *Inessential Woman* 129). These sexist and racist institutions of embodiment share a common ground of “somatophobia”, that is, “fear of and disdain for body” (126-132). Mary Vermillion in “Reembodying the Self: Representations of Rape in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*” demonstrates how Jacobs and Angelou overcome somatophobia by constructing a “new image” of an assertive and autonomous Black woman (245). Vermillion argues that in order to challenge somatophobia both of the writers “obscure their corporality”, remove the site of devaluation from body to race (and class in Angelou), and “celebrate[ing] their bodies and motherhood as symbols of their political struggles” and autonomy (250-256).

Angelou is evidently aware of herself being a Black woman when she writes her autobiography. To be a Black woman is to face the two-fold discrimination and oppression of racism and sexism (Hooks 1-13). It is, therefore, not unusual that she begins with an event where her consciousness is interrupted by forgetfulness because her sex and her race are devoid of mind. John Lock in the essay “Of Identity and Diversity” defines identity as an uninterrupted and continued existence, and an uninterrupted consciousness of a thinking

being constitutes personal identity (24-32). Marguerite's failure to remember the Easter song indicates her fragmented identity. Her identity is fragmented because she along with her sex and race has a given body. The body is culturally distorted. Addison Gayle, Jr. accounts for a literary history of cultural reception of Black bodies in "Cultural Strangulation: Black Literature and The White Aesthetic" (39-46). He contends that the symbolic reference to black as mysterious ominous entity traces as far back as Shakespeare's characterization of Othello and Caliban. The mythical symbolization of black as dark evil harmful element is used as a cultural trope down from Beowulf, Canterbury Tales and Paradise Lost and in the 18th century that mythical literary cultural symbolism of black as evil impure and ugly begins to assume the racial ethnical dimension of inferiority and barbarity. In 1719 Defoe's Robinson Crusoe incorporates the contemporary issues of colonization and slavery in the adventurous tale of Crusoe and tries to find a rationale behind a white existence in the new land with the motif of colonization and enslavement of Friday in order to civilize both the land and the inhabitant. Defoe justifies the Platonic Christian aesthetics by associating the black Negro with savage, ignorant and inferior. "The Black body has been historically marked, disciplined, and scripted and materially, psychologically, and morally invested in to ensure both white supremacy and the illusory construction of the white subject as a self-contained substance whose existence does not depend upon the construction of the Black qua inferior" (Yancy 17). The mythology of Black body is not only conflated through cultural and psychological prejudices, but in fact is scientifically tested and shown to inhabit brute animal sexual appetite. Sander L. Gilman makes a historical probe into the conventions existed in the aesthetic and scientific spheres in "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature". She notes down how the Black female were sexualized and associated with prostitution in the iconography of the Nineteenth century. The classic works such as Edouard Manet's Olympia (1862-3), Titian's Venus of Urbino (1538), Francisco Goya's Naked Maja (1800), and Eugene Delacroix's Odalisque (1847) juxtaposed sexualized women with Black female and helped defining depraved sexuality of the Black, male and female (206).

### **Maya Angelou and the [Em]bodied reality:**

"Wouldn't they be surprised which one day I woke out of my black ugly dream, and my real hair, which was long and blond, would take the place of the kinky mass that Momma wouldn't let me straighten?" (*Caged Bird* 8). Here, Angelou articulates her response and resistance to reality. The reality is her body which is Black and ugly. Her experience with the body is at odds with her mind which is convinced of a white body-image. The revelation of her intelligible sensation of her body is a surprise to the Black community because it is accustomed to the sensible world of toil and torture. But Momma's prohibition to let her straighten hair is a disciplinary check on her cultural disillusionment. The tragic end of such disillusionment with white culture exemplifies Fannie Hurst's *Imitation of Life* (1933) and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970). In both of these novels, a Black Negro girl is culturally and ideologically disillusioned with white standards of beauty and living. Their cultural education isn't adequately guided at home: Peola in *Imitation of Life* grows in a white household while Pecola Breedlove in *The Bluest Eye* is abandoned by her family.

Throughout *Caged Bird* Angelou interprets people in her family and community by their bodily features. She defines their intellectual capacities in consonance to their body. Black people are always described in voluminous figure: Uncle Willie is a giant Z, her father is bigger, taller and plumper than anyone in Stamps, and Momma's hand could reach ear to ear across her head. In a fully segregated community, whites were rare to be seen except the poor ones. White people are often defined with diminutive and pejorative adjectives: "Whitefolks couldn't be people because their feet were too small, their skin too white and see-throughy...the strange pale creatures that lived in their alien unlife weren't considered folks. They were whitefolks" (24). Here, the racist treatment of 'whitefolks' is best explained by George Yancy as "the phenomenological return of the Black body" and "this particular strategy also functions as a lens through which to theorize and critique whiteness" (*Black Bodies, White Gazes* 51). Marguerite seeing the whites from inside the segregation does counter the white gaze and objectifies the white body in the similar white racist manner. What Angelou suggests is the germ of "The Look" by Jean Paul Sartre: "Being-seen-by-the-Other" is the truth of "seeing-the-other" (96). Living in a segregated Black locality, Marguerite resists the white gaze by confronting it and induces what Sartre has called "shame of self" among the white community: "it is the recognition of the fact that I am indeed that object which the Other is looking at and judging" (99). Just as the "Eighteenth-century travellers to Southern Africa, such as Francois Le Vaillant and John Barrow" who used to report "Hottentots and Bushmen as well as tribes in Basutoland and Dahomey" in overtly lascivious terms, Angelou as a writer registers the presence of whites in terms of rarity, invisibility, alien, and lifelessness (Gilman 213). Whites in the Black Stamps are poor and trash but "spend money so lavishly" (*Caged Bird* 42). Angelou's entire narrative on Black Southern region exalts the segregated life as superior and safe in terms of values and principles. "There was always generosity in the Negro neighbourhood....whatever was given by Black people to other Blacks was most probably needed as desperately by the donor as by the receiver, a fact which made the giving or receiving a rich exchange" (41). Even the Black Stamps withstood the cyclonic impact of Great Depression of the 1930s because of their communal values and practicing virtues. Angelou notes "I think that everyone thought that the Depression, like everything else, was for the whitefolks" (42). The rich superior life that Angelou records of her childhood is the result of a refusal to internalize the white supremacy. The Negro community at Stamps was successful to evade the grim prospects of white racism because the "look of the white subject interpellates the black subject as inferior, which, in turn, bars the black subject from seeing him/herself without the internalization of the white gaze" (qtd in Yancy 52).

The relegation of woman to body and the association of black body with deprived sexuality are the outcome of mystification of the idea of fragmented self and the consideration of the racially marginalized Other as object, a mindless body. The convergence of mind and body is the shared project of feminism and critics of racism. Simone de Beauvoir was right to point out the identical politics inherent in "proving woman's inferiority" and the "equal but separate" formula of the Jim Crow laws aimed at the North American Negroes" because "whether it is a race, a caste, a class, or a sex that is reduced to a position of inferiority, the methods of justification are the same. 'The eternal feminine' corresponds to 'the black soul' and to 'the Jewish character'" (249). Angelou after

the incident of rape experienced a broader divide between her body and mind. The immediate loss was neither body nor mind, but words. The linguistic capacity of the person requires the equal physical and psychic participation: vocal cords and ideas for communication. The loss of words also sprang from the fact that words can pose threat and danger in the social domain. The threat involved the harm to her brother Bailey that Mr. Freeman asserted if she gives voice to the sordid act of rape: "if you tell, I'm gonna kill Bailey" (*Caged Bird* 63); and the danger was informed by disgrace to her family if she articulates the truth that she had experienced an innocent physical attachment to Mr. Freeman: "Grandmother Baxter would stop speaking...people in the court would stone me...and Mother...would be so disappointed" (68). In both of the events, Marguerite resorts to silence and loses her rational agency. Silence links these events to the awkward event on Easter Morning. In the church and the court, Marguerite imagines a confused body-image. In the first, she thought herself a white movie star and in the second, she imagines herself to be stoned "as they had stoned the harlot in the Bible" (68). During the trial, the rational judgement of truth intervene her bodily sensations: "the lie lumped in my throat and I couldn't get air" (68). Angelou's consideration of herself as harlot or prostitute indicates "the linkage of two seemingly unrelated female images: the icon of the Hottentot female and the icon of the prostitute" in the Nineteenth century iconography (Gilman 206).

### Conclusion:

During the 1970s, against the backdrop of the campaign of "Black is Beautiful", Angelou publishes her work and runs odd to the motto of the campaign as it introduces an unadored, un-beautiful and awkward heroine (Arensberg 31). The projection of an ugly girl is, in fact, a calculated effort of Angelou to elicit the functional racist culture and prevalent stereotypes in the common perceptual arena of the people in the 1960s America. The image of an ugly Negro girl underlines Angelou's deeper political motives to demonstrate the mediation of sexism and the socially marginal status of Negro community with her identity, consciousness, and body-image.

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**The Unabated 'Silence': Reversal of the Hysterical Subject in *The Silent Patient* by  
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*Abstract*

*The psychosomatic state in a hysteric subject unfolds a traumatic encounter experienced as “paradise lost.” The unstable, neurotic subject believes in the phallic omnipotence. If the subject is a woman, she always remains the forbidden oedipal object-choice. The subject's quest results in the impossibility of satisfaction. According to Jacques Lacan, desire is always lack/absence of the object causing desire, which has been replaced by name. Alex Michaelides' psychological thriller *The Silent Patient* reveals the hysteric state of a woman -- a hysteric subject who transferences her lost yet traumatic neurosis to her therapist, and the object-relational focus shows how the therapist in his quest to heal his wound becomes the subject. This paper attempts to explore the hysteric subject and its relation to femininity from a psychological point of view drawing from theorists alike Freud, Juliet Mitchell, and Jacques Lacan.*

*Keywords: Hysteria, Freud, Containment, Desire, Transference.*

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The tripartite structure of human psyche has always been an enigma for psychoanalysts to probe into and unravel the complex mechanism of human mind. It is, indeed, the inner world of human conscious thoughts and un/subconscious natural drives, which govern an individual's behavior in the outer world. Many of the literary artists have created unforgettable characters ranging from Greek tragic figures like Oedipus and Electra to R. L. Stephenson's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde that illustrate the unbridled impulses and overpowering psychic instincts resulting in strange and unexplainable behavior. One may also recall the silent selfless devotion of Euripides' heroine, that renders her almost outside the contours of normalcy, a symptom of obsession for her sacrificial nature:

But why does she not speak?

--Euripides, *Alcestis*.

The 'silence' as a feminine attribute has continued for centuries to show the psychic obsession as well as repression, notwithstanding, for better or worse. It percolates in the literary sensibility to create characters, which turn into significant symbols of incongruity of human psyche. The 'unexplained' feminine silence surfaces in literature over and over again:

Alicia remained silent—but she made one statement. A

painting.

[...] The painting was a self-portrait. She titled it in the bottom left-hand corner of the canvas, in light blue Greek lettering.

One word:

Alcestis. (12)

In the above extract, this 'non-speaking' Alicia, who finds in her 'self' a mirror image of Alcestis, is the heroine of a psychothriller novel, *The Silent Patient* authored by the 21<sup>st</sup> century writer Alex Michaelides. One of the celebrated works in the list of latest publications, the novel drew considerable readership and attention. It is critically acclaimed 'unforgettable,' perhaps, on account of its exciting blend of suspense, psychological depth and tragic element.

Published in 2019, *The Silent Patient* becomes the New York Times Best Seller. A systematic pattern to build the block after block, woven out with psychological algorithms, Alex encapsulated the thinking pattern of a criminal and her therapist. In essence, the catch-all wrapped up in hypnotic writing from which one will not want to tear oneself away. Alicia Berenson, a painter with a picture-perfect life, had murdered her husband from point zero range, went under a psychotherapy session by Theo Faber. A book much more than just "twisty" – a book is riveting in its own right.

Of course, the book screws up psychotic symptoms because its heroine Alicia, despite signifying the recurring feminine 'silence' is not Alcestis. Interestingly, She imbibes not the sacrificial silence of age old Greek heroine to her husband but her assumed 'silence' is an offshoot of her 'hysterical' state that demands 'sacrifice' from her husband and, thereby, from each 'master'. Hence, her 'hysteria' does not represent her 'sacrificial' instinct but incarnates her revolt against repressive patriarchy, a reversal of the same patriarchal tool to dismantle its gender based binary constructions. It unfurls the gradual subversion of coded patriarchy that leads to the psychological pinning-down of the 'feminine'.

The conviction that hysteria is primarily a female disease dates back to ancient times and is etymologically defined by the term itself—*hysteros* meaning the uterus or womb. The neurotic subject is precisely neurotic because he or she believes in the *imaginary* phallus. "Hysterical" denotes the subject who believes in the phallic omnipotence. That is, he or she believes that there is someone who has or is the phallus, meaning that there turned out to be an "object-love". (i)The *lack* links to symbolization, the production of the signifier, the castration complex, and the death drive. In other words, at first, the self loves the self (or the ego); only later does it 'put out' some of this self-love on to other objects. It is this primary narcissism that re-expresses itself in psychosis, and it was this that was hidden from the psychoanalytic investigation. At the same time, it concentrated on the neurosis whose problematic attachment (but attachment none the less) to objects other than itself obscured this situation. This relational structure works the other way around as well: a hysterical subject in his or her search for the phallus promotes a master figure. Consequently, the

meeting between a hysterical subject and a phallic master creates a structural bond, specified by Lacan (1991) in his theory on the hysterical discourse and the discourse of the master.

Freud's case study regarding Dora shows new avenues into the world of hysteria. Dora is a pseudonym given to his patient Ida Bauer. Her distorted family relationship where the father fails at symbolic level—family friend Herr K's sexual encounter to Dora all led to Dora's hysteric state. Reinterpretation comes at closure while Freud dug down the psychosomatic state of his patient Dora. The message is clear: women who dare to challenge masculine power are insane, and the hysterical subject that challenges the phallic master has to pay the price. The hysterical subject is looking for answers and provokes the master figure to demonstrate his power. The master tries to reassure the hysterical subject with his knowledge, but soon enough, he will have to face his failure. Whatever the quality of this knowledge, it can never adequately tell the truth about what drives the human subject.

Moreover, each time, the hysteric identifies with these answers, thus taking another color, namely the color of the new master, it changes their relational equation. At every stage, the interaction ends inevitably with an exposure of the master's failure. For Lacan (2004), acting out is an appeal addressed to the Other, and every hysterical symptom a demand for interpretation, that is, a demand for the final answer. Traditional hysteria is embedded in a traditionally patriarchal society, although the patriarch might take different forms (a religious father is not the same as a scientific father). A typical gender-based role assignment is installed time and again. Power and knowledge is resided with the man/father, while desire and lack is resided with the woman/mother. Answers are expected from the father, the main one being a prohibition on Oedipal desire. The conventional Oedipal reading declares that women are castrated, and men are phallic heroes. In real life, it is the other way around, as explained by Lacan in his famous Chapter Seven on love in seminar XX. Women escape the phallic reduction, and men are the phallic misfits. Every man acquires his inscription in the Symbolic through the phallic signifier, but it is only the primal father (the exception) who is supposed to have the phallus. A normal man never meets the phallic standard. In contrast, a woman—not The Woman—may define herself in relationship to the not-All (ii), instead of alienating herself to the phallic signifier. The hysterical subject, whether a man or a woman, remains within the phallic logic, meaning that he or she expects the phallus from the master, and in doing so, the master demonstrates his failure to deliver.

Nevertheless, time and again, the phallic patriarch is confronted with the limits of this strategy. This explains the two forms of neurosis in a patriarchal society, with their typical gender distribution: obsessional neurosis for men, hysteria for women. The obsessional tries desperately to safeguard the Oedipal law and the rules; the hysteric challenges them by demanding answers. Both of them have to construct symptoms in order to cope with their anxiety. If they enter analysis, they will have to come to terms with what

lies beyond this law, instead of defending or fighting. This "beyond" is exactly what can not be understood in the Symbolic, hence Lacan's denominations: the not-All, the lack of the Other, S (A) with a slash over the A. Traditional patriarchal society is based on repression. Primarily, the "which" is repressed is the failure of the social system, meaning the fact that the symbolic order fails to recover the Real of the drive entirely. Birth, death, and sexuality escape the phallic order. Via the Oedipal structure, the subject is taught to handle the *lack* in phallic terms (big, bigger, and biggest)—the desire becomes a machine producing more desire for the unattainable object of desire, a.k.a. *Object petit a*. There is no room for femininity beyond the phallic *jouissance* (iii). The cornerstone of this system is the primary repression channelized to the unconscious, causing discontent in civilization as advocated by Freud in his *Civilization and Discontents* (1929).

Alicia Berenson, a famous painter, murdered her husband, and the trauma traces back to the loss of her childhood paradise enfolded within the analytic pair of her psychotherapist. Alicia had a long history of mental illness. Her choice to remain silent is only an iceberg—to the society; she is a cold-blooded killer. Time travels, but her performativity remains the same.

Theo Faber, forty-two years old, a psychotherapist understood her silence was a manifestation of traumatic experiences, beginning from childhood to her husband Gabriel's murder. "Unable to come terms with what she had done, Alicia stuttered and came to a halt, like a broken car." Theo "wanted to help start her up again—help Alicia tell her story, to heal and get well." He wanted to "fix her" (16) nearly after Alicia was admitted at the Grove in Edgware hospital. Theo himself carries a fractured childhood within him. Her silence was like a mirror—reflecting himself at him. He was on a quest to help himself, and he chose this profession because he was damaged; all his anguish and remorse propelled him into this profession where he could channelize his trauma and heal himself. In his father's absence, he had erected a father like a statue with snow, and "pelted him violently with snowballs, giggling like naughty children" (19).

In his first session, he identified Alicia in a sudden and unexpected wrench of sadness. He felt desperately sorry for her and those like her—"for all of us, all the wounded and the lost" (39). Evidence is clear about the car accident from her notebook, she wrote in the entry of July 18:

I used to think it was suicide. Now I think it was attempted murder. Because I was in the car too, wasn't I? Sometimes I think I was the intended victim—it was me she was trying to kill, not herself. But that's crazy. Why would she want to kill me?

[...]The truth is we're all scared. We're terrified of each other. I'm terrified of myself—and of my mother in me. Is her madness in my blood? Is it? Am I going to— (59)

Exhausted in every session by the silence taken by Alicia as her invincible shield, Theo in one

session lowered his voice and articulated to help Alicia, just like her husband offered her to help to what Theo had interpreted Alicia's gaze as:

*You can't help me, her eyes shouted. Look at you, you can barely help yourself. You pretend to know so much and be so wise, but you should be sitting here instead of me. Freak. Fraud. Liar.Liar. (72)*

From Alicia's diary, it is also clear Theo is just another *imago* (*iv*). Instinct never fails, not this time, Alicia wanted "to kill him, kill or be killed — I leaped on him and tied to strangle him and scratch his eyes out, bash his skull to pieces on the floor." The psychoanalyst W.R. Bion came up with the term "containment," which Alex used in his narrative technique. "Containment" is a mother's ability to manage her baby's pain. Babyhood is a time of terror. We need our mother to give us the comfort of that "oceanic" stage "to soothe our distress and make sense of our experience" (Mitchell *PF*, 78). However, our mother's ability to contain us fails us; we become hysteric. Theo started to take marijuana to take refuge. Kathy's entrance in his life faded the marijuana in the background — like old mud in the boot.

A lost soul time and again sabotaged by traumatic experience by her closed ones. Max sexually violates whenever he got a chance. Max was Gabriel's step-brother, jealous of everything, Gabriel had, including Alicia. He was not in love but possessed to have the *object* from Gabriel's life. Alicia is an *object-love*; just like a child cries for a toy, Max proposes Alicia. Men in her life are the *imagos* — Jean Felix, her childhood buddy, tries to capture the artistic part of the painter forever within him, not necessarily the painter; Max for his jealousy; her husband a protective husband; her father failed to perform the Oedipal subject. All of these are similar to Freud's Dora.

Borderlines are always seductive. Theo wanted to help Alicia by remaining objective about her, staying vigilant, treating carefully, and keep firm boundaries. However, unconsciously, he crossed the boundaries. She was offered a brush and color during her session, and her painting revealed how Theo, from his objective position, becomes the *subject*:

Alicia had painted a redbrick building, a hospital — unmistakably the Grove. It was on fire, burning to the ground. Two figures were discernible on the fire escape. A man and a woman escaping the fire. The woman was unmistakably Alicia, her red hair the same color as the flames. (163)

Theo recognized the man is himself; he was carrying Alicia in his arms, holding her aloft while the fire licked at his ankles. Furthermore, Alicia offered her journal writing in trembling handwriting, sometimes sketches — he has already become the *subject* — Alicia's *subject*.

Alicia's thinking of someone following him is Hitchcockian move in Alex's

narrative. By projecting someone is following her, she splits the self—another subject—different from Alicia. This injured subject's reaction to the trauma only exercises a completely “cathartic” effect if it is an adequate reaction—for instance, revenge. Gabriel thought she is mentally sick, take her to Dr. West, and every time Alicia spat the pills behind Gabriel. The gun that Gabriel bought symbolically threatened Alicia—just like her father executed her symbolically after the car accident; Theo discovered from Paul what her father said after the accident, “my poor girl, my Eva...Why did she have to die? Why did it have to be her? Why didn't Alicia die instead?” (221). She became Alcestis—“her father Vernon Rose had committed psychic infanticide—and Alicia knew it” (221). Once again murdering her husband is like murdering the master who failed the symbolic structure; painting her husband on the cross is the symbolic act of murder, the *real* takes place in this way:

I remained silent. How could I talk? Gabriel had sentenced me to death.  
(262)

Gabriel was a traitor, the brokenhearted faced the betrayer and noticed Gabriel had a tyrant's eyes, my father's eyes.... That's the truth. I didn't kill Gabriel. He killed me. All I did was pull the trigger. (263)

By pulling this trigger, she experiences *jouissance*. The metaphorical “death” of the subject comprises a fractured psyche. The proposition that thanatos conflicts with sexuality. “The notion of a death drive is behind an observed phenomenon such as the compulsion to repeat something”—in particular, to repeat the experience of a traumatic event—and thus to be psychically stuck (Mitchell *PF*, 24). Lacan's symbolic “is constituted by the castration complex, which situates all subjects as either man (living under the threat of castration) or woman (already castrated)” (Mitchell *PF* 43). Condensation and displacement (Lacan's metaphor and metonym) and symbolization are how it works. The threat of castration and its shuffling position: a boy can take up the position of “being castrated” and the object of desire, while a girl can be a subject who is only in danger of castration.

The last painting was the clue to the abyss; Theo discovered “the darkest parts of the shadows came together—like a hologram that goes from two dimensions to three.... And a shape burst forth from the shadows...the figure of a man. A *man*—hiding in the dark. Watching. Spying on Alicia” (211). Alicia wanted to kill the father figure—the little girl buried her pain, swallows the last morsel. Like fire from a dragon's belly, all the hurt and anger burst forth, and she picked up a gun not to kill her husband but to kill the *imago*--without possibly even knowing why.

Theo already crossed the borderline of a therapist—shared his story too, became protective, and had mistakenly considered the role of a father taken unconsciously. He found himself wanting to take care of Alicia, and that is the moment of apotheosis:

As I watched, I felt increasingly sure I had to do something to help her. She was me, and I was her: we were two innocent victims, deceived and

wounded betrayed.... I had no choice. I had to help her (256).

Alicia's painting shuffles the subject position as she understands the real, wounded Theo. Theo is between Scylla and Charybdis: if he identifies with Alicia in the search for knowledge, he becomes a woman, that is to say, castrated, but if he chooses to cast her as his rival, he must win out, or the punishment will be castration. Therefore, silencing Alicia was a masterstroke-- injecting morphine and sending her to coma, not to kill, but to have her forever as possession was the naked truth. Another thing was that Theo always wanted to take revenge upon Kathy's lover. He couldn't, and he shuffled the object position. The hysteric subject finds the analyst's body is a common form of *transference (vi)*. This body becomes an object--an object to love, hate, and experiment. The irony is that the truth is revealed when the inspector came with Alicia's diary at Theo's home. Had she not narrated the jot, but the title, the readers, might have been caught in the crossfire. She took the helm to narrate the oscillating positionality in the matrix of hysteria. The ending is exemplary with a thud – Theo became silent: a moratorium has been offered to retrodict a *prima facie* case of his professional endeavor. Alicia's diary reads:

I opened the window and reached out my hand. I caught a snowflake. I watched it disappear, vanish from my fingertips. I smiled. (274)

### End Notes

i) As Lacan reads Freud, what we look for in our object is not just their own *lack*, but what is lacking from our world. "Love creates its object from what is lacking in reality" he writes in the *Écrits*, while "desire stops at the curtain behind which this lack is figured by reality."

ii) The idea that "Woman does not exist"<sup>ii</sup> or that she is "not-whole" has often been seen as the most offensive of Lacan's formulations about feminine sexuality. Just as the phallus is an 'empty' signifier - it is a signifier of lack and has no positive content - the sign 'woman' has no positive or empirical signified. Lacan can say that women are "not-all" in the field of the symbolic castration, even if the whole dynamic in question only exists owing to the initial presence of this symbolic dimension.

iii) Phallic jouissance is the jouissance that fails us, that disappoints us. The subject, even after it grabs its object of desire remains dissatisfied. This sense of dissatisfaction that always leaves something wanting is precisely what Lacan calls phallic jouissance and defines the masculine structure. A masculine structure is characterized by turning the Other into an object, and mistakenly thinking that the object can fully satisfy its desire. Phallic jouissance is experienced by both men and women, and is defined as phallic insofar as it is characterized by failure.

iv) An unconscious prototype of personae, the *imago* determines the way in which the subject apprehends others. The *imago* is linked to repression, which in neurosis, through regression, provokes the return of an old relationship or form of relationship, the reanimation of a parental *imago*.

v) In French, *jouissance* means enjoyment, in terms both of right and property, and of sexual orgasm.



Lacan first developed his concept of an opposition between *jouissance* and the pleasure principle in his Seminar "The Ethics of Psychoanalysis" (1959–1960). Lacan considered that "there is a *jouissance* beyond the pleasure principle" linked to the partial drive; a *jouissance* which compels the subject to constantly attempt to transgress the prohibitions imposed on his enjoyment, to go beyond the pleasure principle. Freud identifies two drives that both coincide and conflict within the individual and among individuals. Eros is the drive of life, love, creativity, and sexuality, self-satisfaction, and species preservation. Thanatos, from the Greek word for "death" is the drive of aggression, sadism, destruction, violence, and death.

vi) In psychotherapy, a client transfers feelings that were previously directed to someone else to the therapist. The client sees in her therapist the return of some important figure from her childhood or past, and consequently transfers on to him feelings and reactions from the past. *Transference* refers to the actualization of unconscious fantasies, memories, and wishes during psychoanalytic treatment. They are unconscious because neither the client nor the analyst knows initially what is happening in the process. The general assumption is that by working through the *transference* of feelings onto the therapist or analyst, the client comes to confront the actual cause of his or her feelings.

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## **Beholding Herself: A Comparative Study of Major Women Characters of Bhabani Bhattacharya and Toni Morrison**

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### *Abstract*

*The present critique is meant for comparing and contrasting the two prominent novelists of two different classes, cultures and genders, Bhabani Bhattacharya and Toni Morrison, by throwing light on the portrayal of a range of women characters by them. These two authors have not been compared earlier. The paper primarily focuses on the sagacity of both the novelists to expose special shades of woman and to show the multifaceted personality of woman portrayed in quite lucid and efficient way by both of them. The comparative study of their selected novels will bring to forefront their similarities and dissimilarities which, in turn, help open new vistas of knowledge for the readers and broaden the outlook. Three characters of each of the novelists are covered in this paper. So, the study of woman, her problems, her assertion and her identity from two different viewpoints is attempted. On one side, woman and her self is analyzed in Indian culture, and on the other hand, woman of Afro-American culture is under the gambit of study.*

*Keywords: women characters, real women, ideal women, feminist, womanist*

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### **Introduction**

Literature serves two basic functions, i.e. to delight and to edify the reader. Literary genres meant only for entertainment and pleasure are of no use, if there is not any enlightenment of the human soul, spirit and psyche. One of the purposes of literature is to ameliorate the society by eradicating social evils and problems, such as, child abuse, poverty, domestic violence, lack of education, minority classes and women exploitation. Out of these, a lot of eminence is given to the quandary of woman. Wedged between glorification and realism, the woman has always grabbed the attention of litterateurs in the phallogocentric world. Her conceptualization as realistic or idealistic, conventional or advanced, feminine or feminist has undergone a huge change with the passage of time. Literature exhibits the treatment of woman through remarkable fictional characters created by novelists who have viewed at the real self of woman from different points of view. This is why, it is pertinent to do a contrastive study of the women characters of the writers associated to different genders, races, communities, etc. Such a contrast between two elite authors, Bhabani Bhattacharya and Toni Morrison is the locus of center here. This contrast between the female characters of both of them will evidently elicit the varicolored dissimilarity between the model women sketched by a male representing his andro-feminist ideology and the actual women created by a female exhibiting her feminist and

womanist reflection.

### **Visualization of Woman by Man**

Man has always regarded woman as one of the tools aiding him in his pursuit of the ultimate goal of freedom. The world, the history, the society, the culture, the literature and what not, have been created and recorded through man's vantage point. In order to establish man as a legend, woman and her individuality has always been harmed. She is regarded only from the man's perspective. But to understand the real self and gradual growth of woman, it is pertinent to give due regard to the andro-feminist male authors. In the literary backdrop, woman has sometimes been romanticized, and criticized at the other. Right from the beginning, the story bound representation of woman is that of a subsidiary and inferior being. Many male authors have rendered her as a midget, a weakling or deformed being. But, gradually, this literary scene has gone through colossal change. The male Indian writers, although disregarded woman and her power, admit the point that she has exerted a huge effect on man and his culture. Her impact is self-effacing, latent and unnoticed. But there are men who admit that they have been bewildered and at the same time inspired by women. There are many male writers who can be categorized as feminine and at times feminist. But since men can be feminists but not females, hence they are termed as Andro-feminists.

The male author under scrutiny here is Bhabani Bhattacharya, who has presented the optimal women, not traditionally stereotypical and meek ones. Before him, Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan and M.R. Anand have also sketched some noteworthy women characters, but they are more or less docile and compliant beings. But due to the advent of bold female writers like Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Shobha De and Namita Gokhale, the image of woman started changing into an independent being conscious of herself. The replica of modern woman invented by such bold novelists outshined each and every phallogocentric measure set by the conservative culture. Therefore, the women of Bhattacharya have surfaced as archetypes for the generation to come. Bhattacharya assigns different roles and position to the women in his novels. Although, in his novels, women suffer and submit them at first, but gradually, come out from the traditional mooring and mark their presence (Sharma, 81). Although the women in the fictional oeuvre of Bhabani adhere to the established track designed for the Indian woman, he has portrayed them generously with a liberal outlook toward them. His novels are primarily replete with the ideal portraits of woman as compliant daughters, committed wives, caring lovers and compromising mothers, yet he has given them ample liberty to enjoy their womanhood. In his fiction, one can trace all the segments leading to woman emancipation, i.e. subjugated woman, self-conscious woman, rebellious woman and uninhibited woman. The factors responsible for his open-minded approach are the influences of Tagore's and Mahatma Gandhi's ideologies, impact of his westernized learning and the effect of enigmatic personality of his wife Salila, who inspired him to present woman as paragon of perfection. Consequently, he has embodied his discrete values and standards in the course of his narrative. His major women characters are prototypes of tradition, though role models. He has depicted women as independent entities accompanying their male partners, not as

modest puritanical ladies bereft of any liberty. The woman as the representative of the psyche of India is more appropriately painted and interpreted in Bhattacharya's fiction. His females are free from fixations and favoritism related to gender discrimination. One can perceive more vitality and life in his females, since, like a genuine artiste, he has tried to be alive by dint of his characters.

Unlike other male authors, Bhattacharya has completely validated his female characters. He never tried to foist any stereotype on his females by checking how they behave, how they look, and how they communicate. In his novel, *So Many Hungers!*, his main female character Kajoli is a poor peasant girl, who combats with the adversities inflicted on her and her family due to manmade famine. Even in the unfavorable circumstances she maintains her dignity and decorum. Even after getting raped by a soldier, she does not lose her confidence and decides not to sell her body for earning bread and butter for her family. Thus, she considers her existence to be more important and turns out to be a powerful character. Bhabani Bhattacharya is successful in portraying woman characters. He presents the picture of Indian woman full of vitality, high ideals and ray of hope for mankind. In this novel, women are victimized as mother (the peasant mother) and wife (Manju and Kajoli) during the horrendous days of the great Bengal Famine (Singh, 84). Another character Mohini, in *Music for Mohini*, is an appealing, lively and zealous character penned by Bhattacharya. She gets her rhythm back and creates music for herself by coping up with the situations not familiar to her. Her journey from discord to concord wins the heart and appreciation of the reader. Chandralekha, in *He Who Rides A Tiger*, is a combination of intelligence and attractiveness. She infuses courage in her father to fight against the odds prevalent in society and proves to be the real protagonist of the novel. Therefore, all his females, visualized by him, are worthy of appreciation and best examples of man's admiration of woman. He has glorified woman and has viewed her identity as independent creature playing her different roles ideally. Some of his old females are womanly, whereas the younger ones mark him as a writer of andro-feminist approach.

### **Conceptualization of Woman by Woman**

Woman has considered her own self as alien in the society predominantly created as per man's desires. To write fiction as a woman and portray other strong women characters seems to be the most difficult task for a feminist writer. It is compulsory to understand the man's view of woman to do justice with the woman's perception of woman. The feminism, femininity and feminist viewpoints can never be similar to the observations of a man. The man tends to be a man at last. The psychological experiences, actual observations and also metaphysical existence of woman are dissimilar to man. The women characters created by women writers are symbolical of the oppression, repression and suppression a woman has gone through since ages. Women writers have penned more intricate and subtle characters than men, because of the pressures imposed on her thinking process by the patriarchal world. But there are women who have challenged the biases of society and invented some die-hard avant-garde female characters. The recent women authors have denied viewing and probing the world through the vision of man by effacing their real feminine selves and have changed the concept of feminism. Therefore, the fiction of modern women authors is

more overt, accurate to their selves and particular. There is a massive shift from silence to scream.

The female author under analysis here is Toni Morrison, the greatest feminist as well as womanist author, since her females are not only gender conscious but are also conscious of their class, race, ethnicity and culture. Her women are aware that they are not only the object of contempt for the male but are also scorned by the white women. She has presented black woman of African-American origin for whom her own self and autonomy is the most vital. Her females are sometimes the victims of inferiority, sometimes ambitious, unusual and tolerant, but what is more important is their lost existence which they try to affirm. But Morrison has tried to assert her females in a manner that the entire community gets benefitted. In contrast to Bhattacharya, who presented ideal women, Morrison has delineated real females who have surmounted the restraints of the white prudery and male arrogance. She has exposed, challenged and reconsidered the position of black women in American world. Her own traumatic experiences and inhibitions have prompted her to paint women quite authentically. Her novels exhibit the ambitions and aspirations of black woman and her effort to fetch identification in white and male controlled culture. She has projected woman as suffering, struggling, surviving and self-asserting in opposition to the idealistic portrayal of woman as alluring, responsive and gentle creature meant only for bearing and rearing up the progeny. In her fiction, one can observe black females who admire themselves, their community and their ethnicity without getting ensnared in to the male superiority or norms of white beauty. Although her women are the victims of racism, they face and find their identity. The females in her fiction have been portrayed with submissive consciousness, yet striving for identity of their own. The pique of the victimized identity, the struggle involved in asserting the self and the voyage of the self affirmation is by and large dominant in their psychology (Kumar, 2323).

The women of African-American origin experience subjugation due to slavery, color and gender. They make every effort to claim their individuality as creatures of God being opposed by the Males or the Whites. In her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, the concept of western white beauty standards and its psychosomatic impact on a black girl, Pecola Breedlove, is exposed. She is a black youngster, preoccupied by norms of white beauty, who is desirous of the blue eyes. She experiences the perpetual humiliation that poor and black feel in white America. Due to the detestation and hostility faced by her family in the hands of the white culture, she embodied within herself the inferiority complex of being persistently ugly. Through this novel, Toni Morrison investigates the pivotal issue of the effect made by the beauty standards of the dominant white culture on the self-image of the African-American adolescent (Kumar, 61). Pecola lives in a brutal environment, but she possesses a rich inner life and astute powers of perception that have the power to buoy her spirit. Pecola's aspirations are entirely unattainable, since they take the form of a desire for blue eyes. By the end of the novel, she has been destroyed not only by her rape at the hands of her father, but by the abuse that members of her community heap upon her (Smith, 20). Her next novel, *Sula*, is focused on an erotic and independent girl Sula. She is an unfettered girl, who does not want to get belted in the responsibilities of family and marriage. She is not a subjective victim like Pecola; rather, she is an epitome of change. In *Sula*, Morrison

explores the opposite extreme of female sexuality through her title character. Sula is never a victim; she is completely free sexually, never marrying, never becoming pregnant, sleeping with whomsoever she pleases. The price she pays is ostracization and isolation and, narratively speaking, an early death (Eaton, 54). She even gets accused of sexuality and referred to as wicked woman. She indulges in love affairs with her friend's husband and even with a white man. But she is determined to achieve a strong sense of self. Morrison's fifth novel, *Beloved*, portrays another magnificent character Sethe, who is a slave woman. Due to enslavement, she is mal-treated, gets raped and even loses her husband while escaping with her children. She takes the extreme step of killing her beloved daughter to let her free. Thus, she is an extreme example of love within hate. So, Morrison, by projecting the consciousness of individual women characters, highlights the deadlock of the whole black womanhood and hence transcends the boundaries of feminism entering the realm of womanism. Her female characters are specimens of her black feminine consciousness. They do not equate themselves with men; rather, accept their own essential femininity. Rather than aspiring for independence, they consider inter-dependence as the desired solution. They accept that "biology is destiny" and women cannot escape from their biological destiny, whether they like it or not. As long as their biology is there, women are different (Ferrer and Hess, 40). Her black women perform an extraordinary duty regarding spreading benevolence and supporting affection to sympathize for the entire world. They are not in favor of dismissing males, but affirming females. It is known that the womanist approach is "committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people, female and male, as well as to a valorization of women's works in all their varieties and multitudes" (Gates Jr., 70). Thus, Toni Morrison searches for fresh methods of thinking and new notions for amalgamating the whole black community and demolish the fake, self-centered gender dissimilarities separating the black men from the black women.

### **Conclusion**

Finally, this paper aims to conclude the diversified analysis of the women characters of both Bhattacharya and Morrison, the former being the laissez-faire pioneer of perfection and practices, and the latter being the substantial harbinger of identification and emancipation in females. Bhattacharya's Kajoli, Mohini or Chandralekha are not against the phallogocentric model, but they are wide awake self-regulating women. Kajoli's struggle against the manmade famine displays her courage and die-hard attitude. Mohini's transformation from being blithe to responsive woman shows her ideal growth. Chandralekha's journey reveals the radical, dynamic and active side of her personality. Morrison's Pecola, Sula and Sethe face the ingrained resistance from the phallogocentric and the white race. Pecola's psychosomatic turmoil leads her to psychosis. Sula's defiance against the established norms leads her to death. Sethe's desire to be free from servitude results in killing her own daughter. So, in nut shell, Bhattacharya has enriched his canvas by painting ideal, model, feminine and feminist characters, whereas Morrison has expanded her horizon by portraying real, authentic and womanist characters.

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## An Evaluation of Liminality in Nadine Gordimer's *July's People*

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### *Abstract*

*Set during a civil war in the apartheid South Africa, Nadine Gordimer's July's People is centred around the relationship between the Smales family and their former servant July. As the communal ties disintegrate in the novel, three objects play a vital role in our understanding of the characters. For the purposes of this study, these symbols not only help us to reveal the nature of spatial-temporal dislocation but also reveal Gordimer's commentary on the apartheid South Africa. This study aims to contribute the existing scholarship by focusing on the liminal/in-between experience in July's People through analyzing the novel's preoccupation with subject-object relationship.*

*Keywords: Dislocation, July's People, Nadine Gordimer, spatiality, temporality*

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“The old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear” (Gramsci 276). Nadine Gordimer's *July's People* opens with an alternate translation of the quotation above from Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*. Written in 1981, the novel presents a dystopic vision of the post-apartheid South Africa, where a liberal white family is caught up in a civil war between the African rebels and the white ruling class. The interregnum in Gramsci's lines refers to the in-between state in the novel, where the power vacuum created by the disappearance of the apartheid regime is yet to be fulfilled by a new regime. The epigraph from Gramsci is related to two main concerns of the novel. The death of the old reign is a painful process since it does not allow the new reign to be born. The impossibility of the birth of the new reign (“cannot be born”) is tied to the old with a coordinative conjunction. The “and” that is connecting the old to the new emphasizes both the result (as in 'since the old cannot be completed, the new cannot be initiated') and simultaneity (as in 'the death and birth processes coincide'). In that sense, birth and death are connected in terms of both causality and contemporaneity. This reflects the novel's concern with the temporal and spatial dislocation, which are “the morbid symptoms” of the suspension of the political and social structure. In Nadine Gordimer's *July's People* we observe two morbid symptoms: temporal and spatial dislocation, which do not allow the characters to position themselves in the social structure. This inability of adapting oneself to the society is reflected through three symbols revolving around three objects in the novel: a pickup truck, a radio and a shotgun. As the white liberal family is dislocated, they hold onto these objects that are valuable symbolically but functionless in



their living conditions. Before talking about how the novel problematizes the character relationships in a social structure, it is vital to look at the context that *July's People* was written and its place in the dystopian tradition.

Set during a civil war in South Africa, *July's People* is centered on the interaction between the Smales family and their servant July. The novel opens immediately after the breakout of the civil war between the black South African rebels and the white ruling class. July helps the family to escape from the war-torn Johannesburg and they take shelter in July's native village in rural Africa. Although the novel imagines a dystopian future, as Gordimer stated in an interview in 1987, the harsh living conditions and the tension felt in the interracial interactions were evident in the apartheid South Africa: "In the few years since it was written ... many of the things which seemed like science fiction *then*, have begun to happen, and it's not because I'm a seer or prophet, but because it was there. We've been doing things that would bring this about" (qtd. in Bazin 119). In 1993, Rajen Harshe writes an article just months before the abolition of racial discrimination in South Africa, reflecting the anxieties of the interregnum. The final years of the apartheid regime, for Harshe, were "a difficult phase of transition that involves rearranging the mechanisms of sharing power among its citizens" (1981). Meanwhile, this in-between political climate found its expression in the "sporadic outbursts of violence between the ANC [African National Congress] and the IFP [Inkatha Freedom Party] supporters in the streets (Harshe 1980). However, these violent outbursts created by the racial tension are only in the background of the novel. The Smaleses only learn the course of the civil war from the news on the radio. Even though Maureen and Bam Smales are the supporters of the black emancipation movement in Africa, their liberal attitude proves to be grounded in hypocrisy as the novel progresses. The couple, first confronted by the material lack in July's village, and then is confronted by the new power relations and their bond to the old society that they were living in. Their adaptation in July's village is interrupted by their unwillingness to share their resources, and their perception of the interregnum as a dystopia.

Wanting of a definitive answer to the question of what a dystopia has led the critics to evaluate utopian strain in the West. One of the most inclusive definitions offered by those critics is Roemer's narrative description: a utopia is a work of fiction that:

invites readers to experience vicariously an alternative reality that critiques theirs by opening cognitive and affective spaces that encourage readers to perceive the realities and potentials of their own culture in new ways. If the [perceived alternate reality is] ... significantly better than the "present," then the work is a eutopia ... if significantly worse, it is a dystopia (20)

Yet, not all the works in utopian tradition conform to this definition. Apart from *We*, *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, or "the classical dystopias" (Moylan 176), there is no clear classification of dystopias written in the post-war period since these works resist neat classification schemes that have been offered by various critics. However, it must be noted that the emphasis is on the reader/writer's perception of the fictional worlds in Roemer's definition. As it will be mentioned later in the article, the reader's perception of the narrative

is limited to the perspective of the Smales family. The supposed end of the apartheid regime is neither desirable or undesirable because a simple reversal of the power dynamics (black population dominating over white, instead of white dominating black) is not necessarily emancipatory for both parties. Because the power vacuum after the end of apartheid is filled with civil war and social unrest, instead of equal rights or representation, and this phase is repeatedly called "interregnum" in the novel.

To understand the interregnum, or the liminal/in-between experience felt in *July's People*, we may look at Victor Turner's account of the difference between society and *communitas*. In *The Ritual Process*, Turner defines two juxtaposed and alternating models for interpersonal relationships: society as "the structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of "more" or "less"" and *communitas* "emerg[ing] recognizably in the liminal period" as "an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders" (96). In Turner's anthropology, this liminal and structured modes of human relationships co-exist, and their complementary relationship is akin to Nietzsche's explanation of the origins of Greek tragedy as the interplay of the Apollonian (ordered, structured drive) and the Dionysian (chaotic) drives in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Yet, as cited in the introductory quote, the balance between the old and the new is disturbed in *July's People*, and the two symptoms of this imbalance are the spatial and temporal dislocation.

The novel's preoccupation with dwelling in the threshold and setting the characters in a liminal state is most apparent in the opening passage where the narrator not only gives a context to the events in the novel but also sets the tone in a brief, eight lines passage.

July bent at the doorway and began that day for them as his kind has always done for their kind.

The knock on the door. Seven o'clock. In governors' residences, commercial hotel rooms, shift bosses' company bungalows, master bedrooms *en suite* – the teatray in black hands smelling of Lifebuoy soap.

The knock on the door

no door, an aperture in thick mud walls ... *Bam, I'm stifling; her voice raising him from the dead, he staggering up from his exhausted sleep* (Gordimer 1)

The temporal dislocation felt by the Smales family is reflected in the form. Whilst the second paragraph sets in Johannesburg, with "the knock on the door", the reader is immediately transferred to July's village. The transition between the master bedroom and the mud house is so sudden for the characters that there are no punctuation or temporal reference but only a negation of the spatial reference ("the door / no door"). Also, it is no coincidence that the novel opens in a threshold, emphasizing the liminal (literally "threshold" in Latin) experience felt in the interregnum. Hence, even Maureen and Bam's reactions are not in a stable state. Whilst Maureen is suffocating, her voice raises her husband "from the dead".

Yet, not every element in the passage is intermingled and coexistent. There are sharp turns separating then and now. The mention of the “black hands smelling of Lifebuoy soap” raises a red flag. Since brands such as Lifebuoy exploited the colonizer's obsession with hygiene in the 1920s (Lock and Nguyen 161). Maureen's concerns about hygiene are also evident when Maureen is mentioned bringing toilet rolls, instead of more essential materials while running away from Johannesburg. Yet, the lifebuoy reference is not only about hygiene. With a genius pun, Gordimer also points out July's role as a metaphoric lifebuoy to the Smales family, hence, depicts him as a sympathetic character.

Moreover, the paralyzing effect of the interregnum, as illustrated above ('suffocation' and 'raising from the dead'), is so devastating and dislocating for Maureen that she wakes up thinking:

As if the vehicle had made a journey so far beyond the norm of a present it divided its passengers from, that the master bedroom *en suite* had been lost, jolted out of chronology as the room where her returning consciousness properly belonged: the room that she had left four days ago (Gordimer 3-4)

Maureen's temporal and spatial dislocation is supported by the divided sentence structure in the novel's form. The first phrase after the comma is a nominalized clause (beginning with 'that') which turns the rest of the clause into a noun. By nominalizing the phrase, “that” also separates/ divides the sentence, i.e. Maureen's thoughts can also be read as “As if the vehicle had made a journey so far beyond the norm of a present it divided its passengers from ... the room that she had left four days ago”. In that sense, the master bedroom's state of being 'jolted out of chronology' is itself divided from the sentence. Because of their temporal and spatial dislocation, the Smales are gradually stripped off from their connection to 'the old' social structure and these are reflected in three vital objects in the novel.

Each object has a dual role in the plot and the characterization. Whilst each of them explores a different aspect of the relationships between the characters, they also disclose what the white quasi-liberal family has lost in the interregnum. The vital role of the objects in the novel is, in fact, pointed out earlier in the novel by the narrator: “In various and different circumstances certain objects and individuals are going to turn out to be vital ... and the identity of the vital individuals and objects is hidden by their humble or frivolous role in an habitual set of circumstances” (Gordimer 6). Although the narrator, at this point, refers to 1976, Soweto Riots in South Africa, these 'vital individuals and objects' also refer to the individual characters and their relations to certain objects.

The first vital object in the novel, reflecting the Smaleses' inability to adapt themselves in their new environment, is the pickup truck, which not only represents mobility and freedom but also creates the tension between Maureen and July. As the white liberal family cannot drive the truck, July keeps the keys as did he in Johannesburg (Gordimer 69) and the entire relationship between July and the Smales is supposed to be built on equality both before and during the interregnum. Yet, when July drives the truck to buy the necessary items from the local shop without asking the Smaleses' permission,

Maureen assumes a hostile discourse. As if to command her slave, Maureen says: "Go and say I want to see him" (Gordimer 68). To understand the complex web of social relations, we may refer to Turner's distinction of the liminal experience which would fit the in-between state in the novel. For Turner, there are two types of liminality:

[F]irst, the liminality characterizes *rituals of status elevation*, in which the ritual subject or novice is being conveyed irreversibly from a lower to a higher position ... [and] second, the liminality frequently found in cyclical and calendrical ritual, usually of a collective kind, in which ... groups or categories of persons who habitually occupy low status positions in the social structure are positively enjoined to exercise ritual authority over their superiors; and they, in their turn, must accept with good will their ritual degradation. (167)

Even though there is not a ritual of "status reversal", as Turner would call, in *July's People*, Maureen feels the degradation and the status change after July takes the keys of the car and as seen from the quote above, she tries to assert her superiority by commanding July to come see her. Because, even though she seems to perceive July as her equal, the truck as the symbol of mobility and freedom turns into a manifestation of resentment. She is so resentful of seeing July leaning his back against the car that she thinks that: "[p]ride, comfort of possession was making him forget by whose losses possession had come about" (Gordimer 94). Dramatic irony, on the other hand, is that, it is the loss of the black African whose exploitation generated Maureen's possessions. As Harshe points out, in the context of apartheid South Africa:

87 per cent of the land was grabbed by the minority white population while the blacks have had to contain themselves within the remaining 13 per cent of the land. Most of the fertile and mineral rich patches of land were controlled by whites ... [S]everal decades of geographical segregation, educational discrimination and impoverishment continued to obstruct the blacks from capturing high paying or skilled jobs. (1981)

Maureen's father was also a mine owner who mistreated his workers. She recalls their shift boss who "spoke the bastard black *lingua franca* of the mines, whose vocabulary was limited to orders given by whites and responses made by blacks", and the narrator emphasizes that this is "an old story that [Maureen] had been ashamed of" (Gordimer 45). In that sense, Maureen is unable to conceive her complicity with the exploitation and injustice in the apartheid period, as she is unable to confront the leveled relationship between her and July in the interregnum. Despite Maureen's twisted perception of the hierarchy between them, the situation is exactly the opposite for July. Even though their status has been levelled in a bare survival, July acts as if the Smalesees are his masters. If we go back to the opening passage of the novel, July's very first act is "ben[ding] at the doorway". Therefore, for July, the transition between the master bedroom doorway to the mud hut door is not so radical as it was for the Smalesees whose understanding of their hierarchical position has collapsed.

On the other hand, the radio, as the second object, illustrates the extent of the

Smaleses' temporal dislocation from the outside world, as well as their growing sense of alienation from one another. During their refuge in July's village, a small radio becomes their sole connection to the outside world. Trying to fix the radio or to find a frequency is a means for Bam to occupy his mind and still feel useful. Therefore, he is always seen while "fiddling with the radio" (Gordimer 138). Yet, the news that Maureen and Bam are eager to hear becomes less and less intelligible. "There were other radios in the community, bellowing, chattering, twanging pop music, the sprightly patter of commercials in a black language; the news reader's gardening-talk voice spoke English only to the white pair, only for them" (Gordimer 25). What strikes the reader as odd is the broadcasting of lively pop music during a civil war. It is as if the black community in the village has no bond with the events that are happening outside their village, as does the nonchalant broadcasters. Yet, the Smales is the only the audience of the news in the village. Even in their eagerness to learn about the events outside the village, their position as the audience reduces them to passive receivers. And they become more passive through the middle of the novel, where the couple listen to the news for the last time in English: "The reception was bad, the reader was bad, the reader a stumbling speaker - who was left, at the state broadcasting service's splendid towers of granite, to do such a job? Possibly the transmission no longer came from there" (Gordimer 88). The suspension that the news is no longer transmitted from the state broadcasting center removes them once again from the events since they receive their information from a state agency that is already removed from the heart of the civil war. From this point on, the language of the radio shifts from English to Afrikaans and Portuguese (Gordimer 110) that would make impossible for them to understand what is happening 'back there'.

The military and masculine power are reflected through the shotgun symbol that acts as the manifestation of Bam's temporal dislocation. "All the old games, the titillation with killing-and-not-killing, the honour of shooting only the wing, the pretense of hide-and-peek invented to make killing a pleasure, were in another kind of childhood he had been living in to the age of forty, back there" (Gordimer 77). It is evident in the passage that for Bam, the presence of the shotgun in the village is the reminiscent of a lost past and the remnant of his 'old games' with his immediate surrounding. Yet, as the narrator emphasizes, his hunting activities 'back there' were childish (noting the word choices 'titillation', 'hide-and-peek'), compared to his current situation of hunting wart-hogs to feed the village. In that sense, his hunting activity is a way of asserting his masculinity. Whilst Bam's position as the meat-provider in the community can be read as a rite of passage, in the sense that the individual in *communitas* earns his position in another group, Bam's self-perception problematizes this view. Bam is forced to face the revolting aspect of hunting when he shoots his first piglet on its head:

It was horrible, the bloodied pig-face weeping blood and trailing blood-snot ... Game birds (his usual prey) had no faces, really ... a guinea-fowl head doesn't look much different, dead, from alive ... He understood, for the first time, that he was a killer. A butcher like any other in rubber boots among the slush of guys, urine and blood at the abattoir. (Gordimer 77-78)

These horrid images of his hunt draw a stark black-white contrast with the faceless games he hunted 'back there'. Facing the consequences of his actions, Bam cannot integrate into the community. Even with a symbol of military and masculine power, Bam is unable to respond the expectations of the village, at least in a psychic level.

Moreover, Bam's already precarious masculinity is further challenged by the tribal chief where he is asked to teach the soldiers in the tribe how to shoot in two consecutive scenes. Summoning the Smalese to his court, the chief expresses his intention of protecting his land: "Those people from Soweto. They come here with Russias [*sic*], the other ones from Moçambique, they all want take this country of my nation. Eh? They not our nation" (Gordimer 119). Even though the aggression of the tribes the chief mentions may fall into the category of tribalism and chauvinism, the sole purpose of the chief in *July's People* is to defend his tribe against "those Soweto and Russias". Taking the period of Gordimer's writing of the novel into consideration, the USSR was the other hegemonic power, which would wage proxy wars against its ideological enemy, the United States, through invading countries and/or aiding the local rebel groups. In that sense, the chief's enemy is not "AmaZulu, amaXhosa [or] baSotho" (Gordimer 119) but a local tribe and "the Russias", i.e. it is a war against an imperial power. Bam's inability to understand the legitimate resistance is mirrored in the following scene where he is asked the kind of gun that he used in Johannesburg. The Chief says that the "white men are known to keep in their bedrooms, to protect their radios and TV sets" (Gordimer 120). When Bam replies "I don't shoot people", his reply is followed by a "backwash of laughter" (Gordimer 120). This scene is crucial in understanding Bam's self-conception, since he assesses his predicament. It is insinuated that instead of staying in Johannesburg and "defending [his] own wife and children" (Gordimer 121), he ran away. Bam's impotence is emphasized through these successive scenes in the sense that as Bam could not defend his family "back there" in Johannesburg with his gun, he is unable to grasp the rightful war that the tribe is waging. Yet, the final blow is delivered with the robbery of the shotgun, depriving him of his sense of masculine identity. When his son tells that he should call the police to inform them about the robbery, Bam experiences a nervous breakdown in front of his sons:

If he couldn't pick up the phone and call the police whom he and she had despised for their brutality and thuggery in the life lived back there, he did not know what else to do.

...

He lay down on his back, on that bed, the way he habitually did; and at once suddenly rolled over onto his face, as the father had never done before his sons. (Gordimer 145)

This is the last appearance of a patriarch who would never reclaim his masculine power through a vital object and is left alone by his apartheid government that would intervene so-called 'brutality and thuggery.'

The novel concludes with the arrival of the fourth vital object. With the emasculation of her husband, Maureen falls into a despair that leads her to run for the slightest chance of

survival. As a helicopter, whose origin is unknown, arrives July's village, Maureen runs towards it without knowing "whether it [held] saviours or murderers" (Gordimer 158). And as Maureen leaves her family behind for her own survival, the narrator says:

The real fantasies of the bush delude more inventively than the romantic forests of Grimm and Disney. The smell of boiled potatoes ... promises a kitchen, a house just the other side of next tree. There are patches where airy knob-thorn trees stand free of undergrowth and the grass and orderly clumps of Barberton daisies and drifts of nemesia belong to the artful nature of a public park. (Gordimer 160)

What is significant in the narrator's description of Maureen's delusion is that both flower species, Barberton daisies and nemesia, are indigenous to Africa. Yet, these flowers are juxtaposed with another horticultural element that belongs to the world outside July's village, a public park. The very appearance of the helicopter induces Maureen to act in state of confusion of fantasy and reality. This is why the narrator distinguishes 'the real life fantasy' from 'the romantic' fantasies. Whilst both are a form of escapism, the former's influence comes from its power to juxtapose more inventively. The helicopter is the big unknown at the end of the novel. Its ambiguity does not allow the reader to decide whether it is a hope for survival or a possible threat. It is neither one nor the other. Yet, it carries the hope of reconnecting the past to the future and the old to the new. As each vital object in the previous examples is tied to the society 'back there', the helicopter image also creates a sense of hope and connection to the future with the juxtaposition of reality/fantasy, the belief in 'the survival of the fittest'/a delusional mind, and so on.

Even though they consider themselves as a liberal family, the Smales "had tried to train [July] to drop the 'master' for the ubiquitously respectful 'sir'" (Gordimer 52). Even in this small instance, the verb 'train' carries the Smaleses' presupposition that July needs to be educated and the family's hypocrisy. This quasi-liberal attitude is exposed with the emergence of various morbid symptoms, finding their expression in the vital objects in *July's People*. These objects not only reflect the spatial and temporal dislocation experienced by Maureen and Bam but also represent what is at stake for them in this interregnum. As the analysis of the interregnum in the novel shows, *July's People* differentiates itself from the other books in the dystopian tradition. As can be seen from the above quotes related to radio, the narrator makes brief references to the turmoil out there, yet the characters in July's village are isolated from the dystopic terrain where everything crumbles into uncertainty. In that sense, the novel is not a typical dystopia depicting a complex web of relations in a social setting with a special emphasis on the politics of that fictional world, as it is in Huxley's *Brave New World*, for instance. *July's People* is rather an inner dystopia where the characters confront both their inner conflicts and conflicts with other characters in the novel. Another conclusion that can be drawn from our analysis is that the novel's problematizing of the human relationships in the interregnum through giving each symbol a context of ownership and locality. In the case of the car keys, for instance, July was the keeper of all keys in Johannesburg. Yet, as the spatial dimension changes, the owner/holder paradigm shifts. Radio, on the other hand, reflects the characters' isolation from the civil war at a surface level. But at the same time, it reflects how Gordimer chooses to comment on the

apartheid South Africa by both engaging in a political commentary whilst distancing her novel's setting and its characters from the immediate politics of her time by positing the characters in a different spatial and temporal context.

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## Self-Transforming Metamorphosis of Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*

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### *Abstract*

*A Doll's House* represents transformation, modernization, quest of new identity, conflict and 'Existential anguish' of Nora who is torn between social conformity and modernity. The metamorphosis of Nora created a loud uproar amongst the contemporary society. However, this discovery of true self has ever been quite controversial. The present paper is an attempt to analyse the emancipation in case of Nora with a feminist and existential approach.

*Keywords:* Existentialism, feminism, metamorphosis, transformation,

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Man has used woman as an object for pleasure, a piece for decoration and above all a mere puppet who is always considered as inferior to her male counterpart – biologically, intellectually, emotionally and socially. But after a long period of conformity, woman's aggression came to the surface in the form of feminism. However, the emancipation of woman is not without controversy as existential anguish, angst and conflict as a result of freedom to choose, have always been a matter of discussion and debate. This is exactly the predicament of Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* whose two choices – forging her father's signature and leaving her family at the end – have raised the questions whether she could create her self and would be able to live in accordance with this self. The present paper is an attempt to analyze the dynamics of Nora's metamorphosis.

It is pertinent to take recourse to the times of Ibsen. Set in an upper-middle class home, *A Doll's House* demonstrates the importance of social class in late-19th century Norway. Born into the upper-middle class himself, Ibsen not only understood the importance of social class, but also the expectations placed on its members. Likewise, *A Doll's House*, based on the life and experiences of a woman named Laura Kieler who almost exactly resembled Nora, tells the story of Nora and Torvald: a married couple living in a society where to keep one's social standing, one has to abide by its strict, and at times, suffocating standards. The play seeks to expose the injustice upon women, which was inherent in the culture and attitude of the male-dominated society of the late nineteenth century Norway. It deals primarily with the desire of a woman to establish her identity and dignity in the society. It is about the disillusionment of a wife about how she has been dominated and how her basic right, her right to be someone, has been ruthlessly destroyed in the name of love by her husband. Clearly aware of the subordination of women in late-19th century Norwegian society, Ibsen wrote in his notes for *A Doll's House* in 1878, "A woman cannot be herself in

contemporary society, it is an exclusively male society with laws drafted by men, and with counsel and judges who judge feminine conduct from the male point of view" (McFarlane 90).

The transformation of Nora from "baby doll" and "doll-wife" to a certain individual in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* came as a bombshell to the audience of the time. While choosing between motherly love and her own identity Nora would have gone through existential anguish, but she stands tall as an example of individual's liberation from the restraints and shackles of social norms. Her emancipation from the rights and powers which her husband exercised on her, is a trumpet call to the women of all times as it exhorts them to rise and claim their due. That belittling of women which has been accepted as a norm in almost all the societies, has been dealt with defiant revolt.

In the very beginning of the play it is quite evident that Nora is playing the role of a devoted and a subservient wife whose identity is belittled by her husband not only through actions but also through gestures and expressions. Torvald looked upon his wife as his possession or property who should adjust herself completely according to her husband's ideas, views and opinions. The power of money which he shows while asking her to restrain herself from being spendthrift, the customs and traditions, the heredity and environment – all stifle the claims of the Self in case of Nora.

The word *Doll* – a metaphorical representation of psychological captivity – represents a woman without any individuality. Dolls are not real people and are not treated as such. The same is in the case of Nora. Nora tells Helmer, "I'll be a fairy and dance on a moonbeam for you, Torvald" (43). Addressing his wife as "my little squirrel," "my little spendthrift," "my little skylark," "little Nora," "little soul" and so on, Torvald has diminished her existence to an object or a pet only who is just conforming to Torvald's ideas, opinions and tastes. Nora says:

Yes, that's the way Torvald wants things. There has to be some style there, he says, otherwise it offends his eyes. Look, you see how the pattern on the cups matches the pattern on the napkins. (McFarlane 1961:318)

At another point she proves herself dependent on her husband even with the matters concerning the household: "Yes, Torvald certainly knows how to make a house attractive and comfortable" (39). Jean Jacques Rousseau has raised an idea that a woman's most important duty in her life is to make her lord (man) happy:

The whole education of women ought to be relative to men. To please them, to be useful to them, to make themselves loved and honoured by them, to educate them when young, to care for them when grown, to counsel them, to make life sweet and agreeable to them – these are the duties of women at all times, and what should be taught from their infancy. (Qtd. In Millet 74)

Nora's whole life is tailored according to the whims and fancies of other people and her

status as a wife and mother is compromised. In order to prove herself as a responsible being for the family, she took the decision of raising a loan which plays havoc with her. Contrary to her expectations on revelation of truth, the house falls to pieces as Helmer peremptorily rejects Nora. This confirms that the house was not a real one based on love, care and communication.

The title of the play, *A Doll's House* is controversial as the house in which Nora lives doesn't belong to Nora at all. There had always been a lack of understanding between Nora and Torvald, as it was earlier with her father. There is an illuminating exchange in the episode just prior to the interlude with Dr. Rank, in which Nora makes a sharp innuendo about their relationship that Torvald completely fails to understand.

Torvald: Now that wasn't that a good idea of mine. (to suggest going to the fancy dress party in the Neapolitan costume)

Nora: Splendid. But wasn't it nice of me to do as you said?

Torvald: (lifting her chin): Nice? To do what your husband says? all right, little scatterbrain, I know you didn't mean it like that. (42)

Nora is indirectly expressing her opinions too which Torvald ought to respect but he is unable to take the hint since it would run counter to his notions about male supremacy.

Nora's relationship with her children is another example of her belittling herself and her children too in return. She places her power above them, calls them her 'doll-children.' She refers to them as 'little darlings,' treating them as the objects of charms or playthings to amuse her. She constantly refers to them as 'little.' When the children talked about their encounter with a 'big' dog, she says:

No, dogs never bite little children, lovely baby dollies. (25)

Her children, however, are not little babies. She continues to objectify them as she has ever been objectified. Rather letting the nurse undress them, Nora takes upon herself the responsibility.

Nora: I'll undress them myself. Oh, yes let me. It's such fun. (25)

Nora is quietly 'playing dressing up' with her children just as a person would do with their collection of toy dolls.

Nora acquiesces in whatever Helmer says. She goes to the extent of self-sacrificing for the sake of her husband's health who doesn't even understand her intention when the truth is revealed to him. The reaction of Torvald made her assert:

... our home has been nothing but a play-room. I've been your doll-wife here, just as at home I was Papa's doll child. And the children have been my dolls in their turn. I liked it when you came and played with me, just as they liked it when I came and played with them. That's what our marriage has been, Torvald. (82)

Her upbringing and circumstances have made her so immature, innocent and somewhat

irresponsible that she forges her father's signature. The forging of her father's signature on the bond and eventually the secrecy and deception in this matter, don't make her inauthentic. In perfect innocence of legal aspects, Nora doesn't give second thought while borrowing money.

The complications arise when Nora is blackmailed by Krogstad for retaining his job at the bank. Krogstad threatens Nora that her forgery would be exposed to Torvald. Nora, in contrast, believes that Torvald though has detestation for borrowings and debts, yet he will still stand by her as he is a loving husband and would take the blame on himself. Not being as independent as Mrs. Linde, Nora for her own security, always believed that:

Nora: You know how much how incredibly deeply Torvald loves me. He wouldn't hesitate for a moment to give his life for me . . . (50)

To avoid putting such guilt on Torvald's shoulders, Nora plans to run away, and even decides to commit suicide (though she admits she doesn't have the courage to do the latter). So much so that she avoids her children believing that her influence upon them would corrupt them.

Nora: Corrupt my little children poison my home? That's not true! It could never, never be true. (36)

The forging of signature and its aftermath was the only happening in her life that lets her grow. The anguish and conflict which she faced while keeping that forgery a secret from her husband, the disclosure of the truth, the reaction of Torvald contrary to her expectations – all prepared her for the final decision.

The “spiritual autonomy” (xxiii) which Nora realizes towards the end against the filthy, corrupt and pretentious married life makes her an independent and confident being. Nora chooses to live and that too without her husband and children, a decision which astonished the contemporary audience who was accustomed to the happy endings. The anti-romantic climax exhibits the development of Nora's character from a “doll” to a self-assertive and self-confident woman whose stature has grown mentally and morally in the course of the play.

“. . . the door Nora slammed as she walked out of her home echoed around the world.” (Qtd. in Ibsen xi)

From a self-effacing woman for eight long years she emerges as an individual in her own rights. The role of strong woman given to Nora makes the play a feminist one, even though Ibsen denied this fact. Nora emerges as protagonist of the play. Ibsen here has subverted patriarchy by making the father figure absent, though important. Even he doesn't let Helmer to grow throughout the play. Ibsen's own argument in itself proves the play a feminist one:

A woman cannot be herself in modern society for it is an exclusive male society, with laws made by men and with prosecutors and judges who assess feminine conduct from a masculine standpoint. (Meyer 466)

The concept of new woman as projected by Nayantara Sahgal in her novels when her women characters leave the families towards the end with all their “bag and baggage” is seen much earlier in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*.

The revelation of the true character of Nora's husband resulted in her transformation and her qualities which were lying dormant under the pressure of her husband, come to the surface. In liberating Nora from her traditional roles and responsibilities, Ibsen comes in close connection with Cixous's opinion:

It is time to liberate the new Woman from the old by coming to know her – by loving her for getting by, for getting beyond the old without delay, by going out ahead of what the New Woman will be, as an arrow quits the bow with a movement that gathers and separates the vibrations musically, in order to be more than her self. (878)

Nora leaves her husband who becomes the cause of her sufferings and moves forward in search of selfhood and autonomy. It represents the struggle of a woman against the hardships and dual moral standards to which she is subjected.

If one wants to look for a non-disciplinary form of power, or rather, to struggle against disciplines and disciplinary power, it is not towards the ancient right of sovereignty that one should turn, but towards the possibility of a new form of right, one which must indeed be anti-disciplinarian, but at all the same time liberated from the principle of sovereignty. (Foucault 108)

However, this metamorphosis which appears to be quite of a rebellious stance on behalf of any woman, is in fact, dubitable as the result is the breakage of family and disintegration of conjugal life of a couple, finally resulting in the lack of motherly love for children. Nora too is quite conscious of this apathy, “Never to see the children again. Never, never – oh, that black, icy water! Oh, that bottomless – ! If it were over!” (Ibsen, 96) as this is the price which she is paying for her emancipation. The choice of leaving her family which may result in existential anguish was the real transformation. In the words of Ledger, “. . . a price need to be paid for the emerging identity named 'New Women'" (79). Further, the metamorphosis seems to be shrouded in suspicion and throws up certain queries about how a dumb woman can transform herself into an independent and assertive individual.

*A Doll's House* is a telling tale of that transformation, a telling tale of that process of modernization, a quest of new identity, a saga of in-between dualities of 'existential anguish' of a character torn between the values of tradition and modernity, of true self and the illusion. (Shahin 288)

However, it is a revelation that the complex phenomenon has led to the complete transformation of her personality. Eventually Nora emerges as a subdued voice of every woman who in her heart of hearts desires to quench her thirst for identity but abides by

social order and patriarchal norms, without abdicating her autonomous will.

The idea of “New Women” is in itself controversial till date. Georg Brandes calls Nora “a new creature.” (170) In order to liberate herself, she took the extreme step of leaving her home, husband and children with whom she was living contentedly and without complaint. No doubt, the freedom of choice and individual dignity are the most important existential values but in case of Nora these are generated only after passing through frustration, anguish and painful striving.

In one of his interviews Ibsen avers that he believes “in the right of every person to know his or herself, a right that is denied women in this male dominated society. In leaving her family Nora demonstrates the fact that without knowing herself she cannot be sure of any aspect her life: not her husband nor her children” and any other ending to the play would be “a barbaric act of violence to the play” (Reinert O 2005). The avalanche effect in case of Nora resulting from the conflict between traditional and modern value system as well as social and individual perceptions, is the manifestation of existential dualities which every human being confronts.

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## A Psycho-biographical Perspective of Kahlil Gibran's *The Broken Wings*

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### *Abstract*

*This attempt at a psycho-biographical interpretation of Kahlil Gibran's The Broken Wings, defines what a psycho-biographical study is, to begin with, and delves deep into: Gibran's definition of love; the biographical resemblance between his life and The Broken Wings; the influence of Mary Haskell on his life; the source of inspiration behind the publication of The Broken Wings; and the universality of the lovers therein. The novella also mirrors Gibran's antagonism towards the clergy for their greed for power and wealth; his admiration for his mother's love and sacrifice; his awareness of the dignity of womanhood which motivates him to champion the cause of women, Eastern women in particular. The study concludes with the thought that The Broken Wings is a psycho-biographical representation of Gibran's life at several stages of his growth, and also his state of mind during those specific phases of his lifespan.*

*Keywords: Kahlil Gibran, The Broken Wings, psychobiography*

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### **Introduction**

Prior to spending the mature years of life amidst the skyscrapers of New York, Kahlil Gibran as a child roamed about in the midst of the bushes and trees of Lebanon, enjoying the contrary experiences that stimulated his contemplations throughout his writing career. Multicultural by background and education, he could influence the East and the West alike. Though his concept and style were considered revolutionary by the Arab readers, he introduced the simplicity of English expression and the freedom of thought and openness to them. Side by side, he introduced family traditions, and the poetry and philosophy of the Middle East to his English readers. Gradually, through him the East and the West merged in thinking and style. It is true that he criticized law, religion and the customs prevailing in the social structure of the Middle East. However, he reinforced love, kindness, brotherhood and justice for which he utilized a whole lifespan penning his thoughts on paper, keeping a loveless world in mind. Aware of man neglecting the reality of love, he paved the way for a peaceful society through his writings. It is encouraging to listen to the voice of a psycho-biographical writer, the poet-prophet of love. Gibran will live on for centuries through *The Broken Wings* as an advocate of immense love. The objective of this study is to investigate *The Broken Wings* as the psycho-biographical representation of Gibran's state of mind at particular stages of his life.



## What is a Psycho-biographical Study?

An explanation of “psychobiography” and the “psycho-biographical study” seems mandatory at the very outset because the present study is a psycho-biographical rendering of *The Broken Wings* as an interpretation of a part or whole of Gibran's experiences. “Psychobiography” as Schultz (2005) defines is “the name given to life histories making substantial use of psychological theory and/or research as a means of shedding light on the interior lives of biographical subjects and the connection between the life and the work” (“Psychobiography” *Encyclopaedia of Life-Writing*). In simpler terms, psychobiography is a life history that makes use of the psychological theory to focus on the inner life of a biographical subject -- an account supported by a psychological theory. Trilling (1950) says that psychobiography illuminates the text and encourages the reader to regard it as “no less alive and contradictory than the man who created it” (p. 39). The distinction between psychobiography and biography has been vanishing over the years because biography has shifted recently in a psycho-biographical direction. Hence, psychobiography is now neither exactly psychology, nor precisely biography nor purely literary criticism. Instead of telling the story of an entire life, psychobiography chooses specific events or episodes from life, and focuses on them. Hence psychobiography is more modest than biography. Ross Murfin (1989) believes that an author may write in order to “gratify secretly some forbidden wish” (p. 118). A psycho-biographical study depends on the author's own writing and on external sources for evidence. In fact, psychobiography is biography viewed from a psychoanalytic angle. Some references to Gibran's life prove the psycho-biographical nature of *The Broken Wings* as a novella that distills the ache of a broken heart and broken wings.

## Gibran's Definition of Love in *The Broken Wings*

The definition of love in *The Broken Wings* challenges every worthwhile characterisation of love as Gibran lays bare the love-story of Selma Karamy and her lover whose name is not mentioned in the novella, a fact that baffles or triumphs over the author's purpose. Selma Karamy, the daughter of Farris Effandi Karamy, falls in love with her father's friend's son who reciprocates the love with equal fervour. When their friendship blossoms into love and develops into a deep spiritual union, Selma is empowered to admit that there is something higher than heaven, deeper than the ocean, and stranger than life, death and time. To put it in her own words: “I know now what I did not know before” (Gibran, 1968, p. 42). He too realizes with equal fervour that at that moment Selma became dearer than a friend, closer than a sister, more beloved than a sweetheart, a supreme thought, a beautiful dream, an overpowering emotion living in his spirit (Gibran, 1968, p. 42).

However, fate designs it otherwise. The Bishop, Bulos Galib, desires that his wayward nephew, Mansour Bay Galib, should marry Selma because her father is extremely wealthy. Unable to resist the Bishop's order, Karamy surrenders to his wish, with a request to Selma's lover, “My son, be a real brother to Selma as your father was to me” (Gibran, 1968, p. 86). Selma too prays to God to have mercy on her and mend her broken wings (Gibran, 1968, pp. 60-9). After their marriage, Galib and Selma live at Ras Beyrouth where wealthy dignitaries reside. While Galib spends his time in pursuit of extra-marital sexual satisfaction, the lover prays for Selma's happiness. Unfortunately, the words of Karamy turn out to be a dying man's request, and Selma's lover respects it. Subsequent to Karamy's death, Mansour Bay Galib gets possession of Selma's wealth and makes her a prisoner.

At this juncture, the relationship between Selma and her lover take a revolutionary turn.

They meet in an obscure temple once a month and indulge in the pleasure of conversation, discussing their hidden miseries and imaginary hopes. These secret meetings devoid of any sexual or physical intimacies, with only God and a flock of birds as witnesses, lead to a new discovery of reality -- a reality that fears not the observer's eyes, a reality that suffers no prick of conscience, a reality purified by pain, a reality unashamed before the throne of God. This new reality makes the lover argue, "The oppressed prisoner, who *can* [italics mine] break away from his jail and does *not* [italics mine] do so, is a coward" (Gibran 1968: 96). These secret meetings come to a halt because the Bishop finds out that Selma used to leave her home once a month. Fearing more for her lover than for herself, she requests him to bid each other farewell and separate. He fiercely reacts to her decision assuring her, "I love you, Selma, and you love me, too; and love is a precious treasure, it is God's gift to sensitive and great spirits (Gibran 1968: 104-05). Then in more clear-cut terms he suggests: "Let us go to the coast under the cover of night and catch a boat that will take us across the ocean, where we can find a new life of happiness and understanding" (105).

Gracefully she rejects the offer saying that her love, purified with fire stops her from following him to a far off land. Love kills her desires so that he may live freely and virtuously (106). Not allowing him to make a protest, she just looks at him for approval, and as she had never done before, she flings herself upon him, puts her smooth arms around him, and kisses him. Then she kneels reverently before the picture of Christ and kisses His feet whispering, "Oh, Christ I have chosen Thy Cross" (109). At last, grace dawns on him in the form of one truth - sincerity. He understands that her sincerity would lead her to grace, and he regrets that he could not ascend the same heights. However, with the lapse of time, Selma and her child die during childbirth, leaving her lover alone to pray for them. Thus, grace dawns on him naturally and gradually. "Brimming with tears that sparkle in the eye, the reader of *The Broken Wings* empathizes with Selma Karamy's suffering and admires her capacity for endurance. It is Selma's and her lover's unfulfilled love and the consequent pain that transform them into persons of grace (John 2007: 80). Such a graceful discipline of love portrayed in *The Broken Wings* marks Gibran's definition of love.

### **Biographical Resemblance between Gibran's Life and *The Broken Wings***

There are a number of references in *The Broken Wings* that raise the pointer to Gibran's life-experiences, and therefore, it is possible to believe that the novella is based on his biography. As per his real-life experience, young Kahlil had to depend on Tannous Asad Hanna Dahir when he was in Bisharri. In return for food and accommodation, Kahlil used to help Dahir's daughters with their household chores. He was specially attracted to Hala, the eldest of them, and she responded by listening to his daydreams. Though she was older than Kahlil, gossip spread about a possibility of their betrothal. But Kahlil knew it was not conceivable because of her influential brother, Alexander, a legal scribe and town official, who could not contain the fact that the son of a goat-tax farmer should marry his sister. Bushrui (1987) says "It may have been this youthful incident that provided the substance of his semi-autobiographical novella [*The Broken Wings*] written thirteen years later" (21). The impact of this autobiographical element on *The Broken Wings* is significant in the context of a psycho-biographical study for psychobiography is in a way throwing light on the private life of the author and bringing a correlation between the writer and his work.

If psychobiography emphasizes on the inner life of a writer contained in his work, there is a point in Hawi's (1972) understanding of Gibran's real-life experience. Hawi interviewed several people close to Gibran's family in Lebanon in the 1950s, and discovered that Gibran as a young boy did

fall in love with Hala Al-Dahir. The relationship between them was broken off because her brother considered young Kahlil too low-born for her, and not because she was married to the Bishop's nephew. Waterfield too notes: "After all, he is the son of that ruffian Khalil" (61). Though Gibran and Hala were forcefully separated, they had clandestine meetings like Selma and her lover in *The Broken Wings*, a fact known to a close circle of people in Bisharri. Waterfield notes that "as recently as 1987, a descendant of Hala confirmed the story" to be true (61). Such evidences prove the psycho-biographical nature of the novella because a psycho-biographical study depends on the author's own writing and on external sources for evidence for psychobiography is biography viewed from a psychoanalytic angle.

### **The Influence of Mary Haskell on Gibran's Life**

The influence of Mary Haskell on Gibran's life and works is an accepted fact by their friends and contemporaries. Biographers of Gibran unanimously consider the book autobiographical. Waterfield ascertains: "But what biographers were unaware of until the early 1970s is . . . Gibran's own words on the matter" (60). Before discussing the novella with Mary Haskell, Gibran gave her the outline of the story in English for about two hours during which he said: "Not one of the experiences in the book has been mine. Not one of the characters has been studied from a model, nor one of the events taken from real life . . . The characters and events are my creations . . . an addition to life. I say this because the book dealing with a young man's awakening to life and with a love affair is sure to be called autobiographical" (Hilu 1972:50). All the same, Gibran admitted that Selma was close to his heart: "Sulma Karami I love very much. I've studied her carefully. She's a real person to me!" (Hilu 51). He also wrote to Mary, "This summer I rewrote it (*The Broken Wings*). And you were always with it - so you are in a way the mother of the little book!" (Hilu 51).

By 1911, Gibran moved to New York, and Mary Haskell remained at Boston where her school was. They met rarely and perhaps they tried to maintain the relationship by not touching upon sensitive areas. It is difficult to believe everything Gibran told Mary; it is possible that Gibran might have been dishonest about the earlier affair for everyone knows the lingering power of the first ever teenage love. Perhaps Gibran also wanted to exhibit to Mary his mythical persona than the reality (Waterfield 61-62). This harsh comment by Waterfield is balanced by an opposite view he quotes with reference to an interview with Mikhail Naimy, who confirms that Gibran had made it clear to his uncle, Nadeem Naimy, that "there was no basis of fact in *The Broken Wings*. It seems, then, that in this instance Gibran was not lying to Mary: the book is not autobiographical" (Waterfield 62).

It is interesting to know that whether *The Broken Wings* was autobiographical or not, there is enough proof that it was revised thoroughly prior to publication. If it is not autobiographical, the readers' appreciation of Gibran would have been inexplicable for empathizing so well with the lovers in spite of a lack of experience in the similar context. Waterfield vouches the same view when he argues that, "It would after all, only increase our admiration of Gibran as a writer that he could so fully enter into the soul of a broken-hearted young lover without having had any such experience himself" (61). However, Waterfield (1998) adds that, "Gibran was something of a chameleon. He was perfectly capable of not telling Mary the complete truth, of saying what he thought would please her" (61). This thought is understandable because Gibran's concern for Mary was so strong that he might have feared mentioning the true identity of Selma. He probably guessed that a reference to his teenage love would have put off Mary who had placed him on a very high pedestal. Selma's story is psychobiography

illuminating the text and encouraging the reader to view it from the angle of the man who created it (Trilling 39). As Ross Murfin (1989) surmises, an author may write in order to satisfy a forbidden wish (118). It is also possible to write to satisfy a secret wish and at the same time deny it for obvious reasons.

### **The Source of Inspiration behind the Publication of *The Broken Wings***

Needless to say, Mary Haskell was the source of inspiration behind *The Broken Wings* which was first published in Arabic in New York by Mir 'at' al-Gharb in 1912. It was dedicated to Mary for she was the confidential editor of his English books and whom he referred to as his guardian angel (Hilu 51). Gibran's letter to Mary Haskell says, "At last *Broken Wings* is out and I am sending you a marked copy (in Arabic!) which you cannot read now. Someday perhaps you will read it in a different tongue, and perhaps you will love it as an expression of the blessed year 1911" (Hilu 56). On 28 January 1912, she wrote: "Came from Kahlil a marked copy of *Broken Wings*, just out - with the dedication translated and title of each chapter" (Hilu 57). On the same page was the translation: "To M. E. H. I dedicate this book. Gibran" (Hilu 57).

The Journal says that Mary was moved by the dedication. She replied "... I could only cry out of my speechlessness . . . acknowledgment" (Hilu 57). If *The Broken Wings* is a "tale of tragic love, anguish and separation" as Bushrui (1987) says in *Kahlil Gibran of Lebanon*, the tragic love is not only that of Selma and her lover but also that of Gibran and Mary Haskell (21). The biographical impact of the experience moves towards a psycho-biographical rendering and takes away the distinction between psychobiography and biography in *The Broken Wings*.

### **The Universality of the Lovers in *The Broken Wings***

The lovers in *The Broken Wings* have touched the heartstrings of every reader because they appear so endearing and true to life, though in a transcendental manner rarely seen among lovers. Gibran and Gibran (1998) too believe that the lovers in *The Broken Wings* have psycho-biographical references to Gibran's life. The cry of Selma and her lover: "Oh, Lord God, have mercy on me and mend my broken wings" resemble a line from Josephine Peabody's one-act play *The Wings* (69). Gibran appears to have been influenced by Peabody's line, "Ah Thou! Have pity on all broken wings" (Gibran & Gibran 1998: 217). So when Gibran says that there is nothing personal in this book and calls it a spiritual biography, he could probably be justifying to himself that though the time for the novella is inspired by Josephine Peabody, the space for it influenced by Hala Dahir's Lebanon, and the life-blood for it provided by Mary Haskell's presence, it is not a literal autobiography but a biography inspired by his spirit. Furthermore, Gibran and Gibran (1998) ascertain, "The heroine of *The Broken Wings* was not Syrian in mind or heart: stripped of the superficial jasmine blossoms and lemon scents, Selma Karema could easily have been French, English, Russian, Italian or Austrian" (p. 368). Thus, though the lovers in *The Broken Wings* fall within the framework of space and time and have psycho-biographical references to Gibran's life, they transcend space and time to achieve universality.

### **Gibran's Admiration for his Mother's Love and Sacrifice**

*The Broken Wings* contains a eulogy for his mother, Kamileh, which shows that Gibran was conscious of her love and sacrifice. Kamileh was an affectionate and accomplished woman, and a source of encouragement for him. The words of adoration for his mother are given by Selma who says that the most beautiful word is the word 'mother' for it is full of hope and love coming from the depths

of the heart. She is the source of love, mercy, sympathy, and forgiveness (Gibran 82). Fortunately, the digression does not exceed tolerable limits because of the fine poetry and the delicate human emotion portrayed.

It is known that Gibran's mother, the daughter of a Maronite priest, prepared herself to enter a nunnery but her desire did not materialize. Perhaps for that reason, Gibran had great admiration for nuns: "I love nuns and give them my heart's blessing" (Bushrui & Haffar 1995: 30). It was when he was twenty years of age that his mother shared this secret thought, which is given in poetic prose:

"It would have been better for me and for everyone else if I had entered the nunnery."  
 "If you had entered the nunnery I should not have come into this world," I said.  
 "You were foreordained, my son," she replied.  
 "Yes, but I had chosen you for my mother long before I came into the world," I said.  
 "If you had not come into the world you would have remained an angel in heaven."  
 "But I am still an angel!" I replied.  
 She smiled and said: "Where are your wings?"  
 I held her hand and put it on my shoulder, and said: "Here".  
 "They are Broken!" she said. (30)

This loving and meaningful dialogue was especially significant because Gibran had had his shoulder broken, following an accident in his childhood (Hilu 330).

### Gibran's Beliefs and Ideals

Mikhail Naimy (1964) gives a few biographical details regarding the milieu and the moment encircling *The Broken Wings*. According to him, Gibran had started working on *The Broken Wings* since his return from Lebanon in 1903. Naimy's testimony is that, "A year after his return from Paris, Gibran was on his way to New York. In his ears he carried Marrianna's (his sister's) sobs; in his eyes, her tears; in his heart, the love and blessing of Mary; in his pocket, a small sum of her money; in his satchel, the manuscript of . . . 'Broken Wings' together with an English copy of Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*" (108). *The Broken Wings* is full of simple poetry and tender emotion of love because it was written before Gibran read Nietzsche. Yet, *The Broken Wings* is a balanced criticism of laws, society, authorities and clergy in particular. Gibran "expressed disappointment over the weakness of his countrymen who quietly surrendered their own power to the traditional authority of the clergy" (Otto 1963: 24). As he set forth to right wrongs in his own country, he grew more confident in his "prophetic" role. Though the venue of his mission was Lebanon in the beginning, he embraced the whole world in concentric circles.

Gibran was a supporter of women, especially Eastern women. When *The Broken Wings* was published, May Ziadah, a young Lebanese woman, three years junior to Gibran and a writer of literary reviews, living in Cairo, wrote to him praising his style. But she had no sympathy with the heroine of *The Broken Wings*, a married woman, meeting her secret lover in the temple. In the 'Introduction' to *Gibran: Love Letters*, Bushrui and Haffar (1995) opine: "While Gibran felt that man's only path to self-realization lay in love, May (Ziadah) was all too conscious of the inescapable position of the Eastern

woman and the grip of social restrictions. Though she respected the freedom and individuality to which other women aspired, she could not disregard the silken bonds which tied her to her own society" (xvi). But she agreed with Gibran's intention of "freeing women from the rigid proscriptions prevalent in the Middle East" (Gibran and Gibran 368). Reference to women as a commodity, purchased and delivered, and as an object of sexual pleasure, invited severe criticism from several Arab quarters in the same vein as May Ziadah's but being too strong a personality he interpreted the relationship as "a fragment of the power of love" (Waterfield. 60). Consequently, "*The Broken Wings* established Gibran as one of the first defenders of women's rights in the Middle East" (Bushrui & Jenkins 58).

Gibran campaigned for love, righteousness and joy. Conscious of the clergy's greed for power and wealth, conscious of the misuse of wealth and the destruction of natural happiness, conscious of the mysterious power of love, he was determined to put up a fight against all these by his writing. Waterfield (1998) opines that *The Broken Wings* becomes special for its themes: "What makes the book distinctive of the young Gibran are some typical themes: sympathy for the plight of Eastern women; championing womanhood in general; the idea that wealth is a positive impediment to happiness; criticism of the greed and worldly power of high-ranking clerics . . . and above all the Romantic theme of the power of love to elevate us into a world of transcendent reality" (60).

## Conclusion

This study, a psycho-biographical rendering of Kahlil Gibran's *The Broken Wings*, shows how the novel was influenced by Gibran's experiences. Young Kahlil lived in Lebanon enjoying his mother's love and sacrifice. Naturally, as he grew up, he respected women and became a champion of women, especially the women of the East. He criticized the clergy for their avarice for undue rights and riches, for he knew too well how wealth could be misused for the destruction of happiness. Having been educated in the East and the West, he succeeded in becoming an interpreter of America, Europe and the Middle East. He was the cause behind many social, political and religious reforms carried out in the East. On the whole, he was absorbed by the mysterious power of love. He cared for his fellowmen, and wanted to teach them how to carry the torch of love throughout their lives. He believed in devotion, tenderness, humanity, camaraderie, integrity, and fought for these values through his writings. In short, he advocated the reality of love for a peaceful society. All these points of view are reflected in *The Broken Wings*, a fact that makes the novella a psycho-biographical composition.

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## Orhan Pamuk's *Snow*: A Bloody Stage

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### *Abstract*

*Ferit Orhan Pamuk is a Turkish novelist, screenwriter, academic and recipient of the 2006 Nobel Prize in Literature. This paper seeks to understand the permeability of life and theatre as it informs Orhan Pamuk's novel, Snow, showing the presence of dramatic elements in reality and imprints of reality in a performance on the stage. As Elizabeth Burns notes, the relationship between theatre and life can be two-way: if the stage is a world in its own right, all the world is equally a stage (Burns 8-11). In Snow, a military coup is 'staged' in a theatre hall, following and followed by real-life suicides, murders, political, religious and cultural clashes—all of which 'happen' most theatrically. The novel shows that while life takes on the dimensions of a spectacle, the performance on stage makes theatre participate in creating and rephrasing reality.*

*Keywords: Theatre, liminality, secularism, Islamic fundamentalism, feminism, radicalism.*

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*Snow* as a title is suggestive of placidity perhaps. Most ironically, Orhan Pamuk's novel of the same name presents a series of deaths in the course of a fierce conflict between the secular government and Islamic 'fundamentalists.' Inked in red is the title on the white of the cover page in one of the editions of *Snow*. Taking theatre as its superstructure, the novel uses performance as an act that extends beyond the stage, in its metaphorical implications and literal manifestations. Not only does the text abound in references to aesthetic performances, but reality assumes theatricality in structure and style when seen as an intense, stage-managed religio-political struggle.

Conventionally, theatre has been defined as being imitative of life. Cicero calls it 'a copy of life, a mirror of custom, a reflection of truth' (quoted in Nicoll 24). Aristotle broadens the definition of theatre by taking it as a creative imitation of life and action. 'Theatre' derives from the word 'theatron' which means 'a place for viewing or watching'. It builds up a spectacle with its plot, characters/actors, action, dialogue and diction, setting, scenography, costume, lighting, music, and so on. The elements of theatre concertedly put together a performance that is more than a simple, unrehearsed and spontaneously lived life. Theatre acquires and preserves its distinctiveness by virtue of its artificiality or excess in representation even as it seeks to reproduce life with impeccability. The 'fictive cosmos' in it renders artistic a simulation of life. Only the aesthetically appealing and climactically impressive performance takes to the stage. Theatre has the neatness of art even as it depicts disorder. It has a distance from life in spite of being close to it. The stage puts itself on a ground above reality. It is fiction, created out of reality, theatrically served.

It is common knowledge that theatre can be reformative, revolutionary, radical and



educative besides being entertaining. It has often surpassed the proscenium stage and has either made reality a participant in the performance or entered the realm of reality and affected it. Sunay Zaim connects theatre with history by quoting Marx as mis/quoting Hegel in *Snow*:

“It was Hegel who first noticed that history and theatre are made of the same materials,” said Sunay. “Remember: Just as in the theater, history chooses those who play the leading roles. And just as actors put their courage to the test on stage, so too do the chosen few on the stage of history” (*Snow* 202).

History and myth, the real and the imaginative, individual and collective sensitivity, objective theses and subjective opinions, craft and vision collaborate in the making of theatre – often leaving little distinction between them. Hence the traditional idea of theatre needs revision as theatre acquires new dimensions proceeding from realistic towards self-reflexive. Victor Turner's concept of 'liminality' of life and theatre is of much relevance in understanding contemporary theatre hence. Life is indeed sometimes imitative of theatre. As Adrian notes in Arthur Miller's *The Archbishop's Ceiling*, 'Funny how life imitates art!' (19). This rethinks the notion that theatre is a separate entity by itself, removed from life. When occasions in life acquire the proportions of a dramatic development or climactic performance, it becomes theatrical. Life stages a performance as if with a narrative fleshed out by actors within a spatial and temporal frame. It also imagines an audience before it which it addresses and enters an engaging relationship with.

This paper seeks to understand the permeability of life and theatre as it informs the novel, showing the presence of dramatic elements in reality and imprints of reality in a performance on the stage. As Elizabeth Burns notes, the relationship between theatre and life can be two-way: if the stage is a world in its own right, all the world is equally a stage (Burns 8-11). In *Snow*, a military coup is 'staged' in a theatre hall, following and followed by real-life suicides, murders, political, religious and cultural clashes—all of which 'happen' most theatrically. The novel shows that while life takes on the dimensions of a spectacle, the performance on stage makes theatre participate in creating and rephrasing reality.

In an undemocratic state, art, including theatre and other cultural forms, has always been under the control of the powerful regime or at its service. In *Snow* the proscenium stage is used only by the military chief to stage a coup and 'educate' the masses. Sunay Zaim always finds the presence of his actor-self in his person as he acts as a dictator in his office. He is a dictator and theatre director. He stands for secularism and what is 'Westernization' to his Islamist opponents. He also seems to fulfil his real life ambitions through the stage. Again, Zaim cannot leave his person behind when he assumes a role on stage. He cannot simply feign a role, he invokes and lives it up. He is his own person on the stage, a being and not a mere role. Theatre is a medium for him to stage the exact image of his extra-aesthetic plans. He draws others into this less-realistic-more-real theatre, including Kadife, the leader of the “head-scarf girls,” whose life changes through theatre. Sunay Zaim's stage is a realm of reality that the audience watches as a space for performance. At the same time, the actors propagate something bold and radical that they cannot do in everyday life. The pretense

here is only of acting, of having an executable plot. Zaim creates a real-life theatre, not imitative of life, but life itself replicating theatre. This explains his death on stage which perhaps he himself had scripted.

*Snow* is based in 1980s-90s Turkey. The country had been a secular power since 1928, but the tilt towards Islamic fundamentalism increased during the '80s and '90s because of growing economic perils and secularism's failure to deliver. The secular, republican Turkish nation was the handiwork of Mustafa Kemal (the Ataturk). The connection between secularism and capitalism in the Western Modernist project is unmistakable. Secularism's exploitative model further impoverished the marginalized classes of Turkey. The danger of erosion confronting Turkey's secularism swings Sunay Zaim into action on the political as well as theatrical stage to restore 'Ataturkism'. He sets out to impose secularism on the country's people – figuratively and militantly. The coercive apparatuses of secularism stand exposed in the process. It is not always unusual for art to act as part of the ideological state apparatus working through its affective power. But here art assumes the power to repress rather directly as it colludes with military power.

The tenor and language of the performance as put on by Zaim's acting troupe unabashedly exploits the arrangements of the proscenium stage to their own advantage – the actors against the audience. The audience is a potential threat to the stage and, therefore, must be the 'receptor' of the revolution that the troupe stages. The interaction between the actors/secularists and the audience/fundamentalists is highly frictional but rooted in the country's old political culture. The fundamentalists and the secularists confront each other in a war-like situation. The theatre troupe directly attacks the audience. This bears direct semblance to Turner's definition of 'metatheatre.' To put it in the words of Leonel Abel,

It breaks the frame of the 'fourth wall' of conventional theatre, reaching out to assault the audience or to draw them into the realm of the play. It may – by devices like plays-within-plays, self-consciously 'theatrical' characters, and commentary on the theatre itself – dwell on the [fluid] boundaries between 'illusion' and 'reality.' Metatheatre presents life already theatricalized (Abel 133-35).

The boundaries between illusion and reality dissolve here completely as some members of the audience are killed and the performance turns into stark reality. Zaim's and his wife's life in the theatre is a war against the fundamentalists whom they consider the enemy of 'progress.' Turkey seems to be a bipolar world, sharply divided along ideological lines, but each part mirroring the other's rigidity and suspicion. The secularists – such as Ka, Turget Bey and Ipek -- were all taken as atheists. Faith without a militant defense of it was seen as atheism by Islamists, a terrible crime, an erosion of morals, wantonness. On the other hand, Islam is perceived as a corrupting influence that makes people lazy, incapable and weak. It was blamed by the Kemalists for Turkey's lack of resolve as a nation.

Pamuk introduces devices and scenes to add a dramatic superstructure to the whole story. The entire conflict hinges on the headscarf issue. Pamuk uses a historic sociocultural symbol that gathers layers of changing contexts, realities, sentiments and perceptions

around it in the course of the novel as a theatrical progression of Turkish history. The headscarf that is commonly perceived by the Western world as a kind of cultural-sexual repression of women, is widely celebrated as a symbol of freedom in some narratives of Islamic feminism. At the same time, the headscarf constructed the female identity in Turkey to the extent that it became a Muslim/Turkish woman's immunity from the 'lewd' Western woman that they would become without it. The politics of the time was fought over it. The tension around the headscarf, which is used as the most effective device in the novel, spills blood in the coliseum of *Snow*. While the headscarf is propagated by the Islamic fundamentalists as an identity marker, the secularists fear the 'Islamization' of the state institutions through such a religiously loaded symbol. The state has banned it in educational institutions, an act repeated over and over again across the West even in recent times. This causes the suicide of a girl in the novel, Teslime, as the choice between her education and her identity – the headscarf was an integral part of her identity – became too difficult for her to make. The director of the Educational Institute is shot to death by an Islamic fanatic for his 'atheism' and nonconformity to the Islamic view of woman. At the other extreme, Sunay Zaim's wife, Funda Eser, performs *My Headscarf* that charges the headscarf with the symbolism of a woman's fettered liberty. She represents the army's oppositional attitude towards the Islamic fundamentalism raging over Turkey. The two modes of performing, in life and in theatre, thus create a sort of conflictual-complementary reciprocity.

Death in itself is dramatic. Its suddenness, irreversibility and its termination of life renders it distinctive from the familiar in life. Death also has the gravity to move people emotionally. Dramatists have hence used death very often to craft a play's climax. Suicides have voiced protests, murders have created villains, genocides have reflected societal turmoil, and self-sacrifice has begotten martyrs – deaths have, in short, created the most remarkable sensation in theatre. Death has been used to make tragedies, rouse sympathy or to restore justice. *Snow*'s bloody stage tells a tale rife with social, religious and ideological conflict with dramatic finesse. The 'suicide epidemic' in Kars, and bringing Ka in as a reporter to interview the families of the deceased, is a technique used to expose on stage the distressing realities surrounding the place and the plight of women above all. We come across women being married off without their approval, wives beaten and tortured by their unemployed men, daughters-in-law taunted for not being able to conceive, girls' virginity questioned by society and suitors backing out of engagements for doubts about their chastity and covered women attacked in educational institutions by forces of the state. The more we learn the reasons that compelled the women of Kars to commit suicide the more we understand the society that Pamuk portrays here. The other deaths have their own place in the artistic economy of the novel-as-theatre.

The killing of the director of the Education Institute is presented to readers via a recording device that the man carried along, apprehending his death, to help the police find his killer in the future. As we hear the conversation between the religious fanatic who murdered him and the director, we are disturbed by a secular-versus-fundamentalist debate. The fanatic fails to understand the secularist and the secular state rudely interferes with the public expression of religious faith. The headscarf as a symbol of 'political Islam'

raises many debates on the relationship between feminism and the interpretation of the Koran. The murderer takes the headscarf as defense of the dignity of women and says, 'Headscarves protect women from harassment, rape and degradation' (Pamuk 46). As a Muslim man, he assumes the authority to interpret the Koran and dictate terms to women, taking them to be the repository of honour as they supposedly are in non-Islamic cultures too. Both the director and the murderer fail to appreciate the subversion in the Muslim woman's decision to wear the headscarf to assert her identity against a masculine, mercenary West and hegemonic white feminist narratives which thrive on the exclusion of women of colour.

In *The Archbishop's Ceiling*, which deals with failed dissent against the Soviet hegemony in the Eastern Bloc, Arthur Miller uses the possibility of a bugged ceiling to bring under it the characters to converse theatrically, as if addressing the hidden microphone that is storing proof of their allegiance to the state power. Pamuk uses Ka's offer to draft Turkey's message to the West as a tool to bring under a roof the diverse opinions of the Turkish people in the form of a live discourse. The collective attempt to draft for the West a representation was challenging because of the existence of myriad factions within Turkey – one absolutely opposed to another. This acts as a reminder that Turkey was a diverse and heterogeneous nation and it cannot fit into the Kemalist scheme which tried to flatten out differences to superimpose on it the fabric of Western nationalism that was largely founded on ethnic and cultural homogeneity. Pamuk's effort is one of a dramatist's to bring on stage a wide range of characters to build the conflict and make them struggle to arrive at a resolution on their identity in relation to the West – whether to be absolutely dismissive of the West or straddle both worlds in their project of nation-building.

This novel also explores the insecurity of the poor in a deplorable Third World country against the presence of the rich and mighty West. Religion becomes the nucleus of a militant nationalism in such hard times, which integrates and serves as an 'appropriate' way to engage with a terrible situation. The West exoticizes the problems of the Third World and the Third World rejects any criticism as 'Western' manipulation. Blue, a militant Islamist, declares the West their enemy and refuses to 'ape' it. Turgut Bey's secular and democratic outlook, on the other hand, prompted him to accept the West as their future. It is interesting to observe how a country's collective history has so many competing versions within it. We see the room full of factions struggling to narrate the same incident in different ways because of their difference in perception as individuals and also as cultural communities belonging to the same country. Pamuk focuses on the split in the Turkish society as he employs another dramatic technique of people answering Turgut Bey's directive that asks each to send a two-line message to the West. This is again conceived as a scene dialogically structured. When the young Kurdish nationalist says, 'We're not stupid! We're just poor! And we have a right to insist on this distinction!' he is faced with the question who exactly his 'we' refers to – the Turks, the people of Kars, Kurds or the Circassians. The debate and the struggle to define their ethnic-national identity proceed to accuse the West of pitying them for their 'stupidity' or never taking them seriously. They observe that they were Muslims before the Turks and the Westerners were simply humans – the universal and general which the Other must define itself in opposition to. In varying degrees many of them assert that their strife was to

understand how cultural and religious conduct was intrinsic to being Turkish and to follow it with piety, their duty.

Kadife ended the meeting with her observations on a woman's choice of covering her head, musing over how every gesture of a woman was burdened with the choice between the Western and the Turkish. If a woman bared her head the West would triumph, and if she covered it she would indulge in Islamic fundamentalism. 'Although Turkey was never colonized, Kemalism's uncritical modernisation project was effectively a voluntary internal colonisation of Turkish society by the imposition of certain simpleminded premises of Orientalism on Islam and Ottoman society' (Carmikli 40). The fraught relationship between Turkey and the West goes back to the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Turkey cannot be lumped together with the rest of the communities that form the category of the East in Edward Said's arguments. Turkey had lost its prestige to the West and hence scrutinized the details of 'progress' made by the West as reasons for their downfall, on one hand, and for their stand against that pattern of progress on the other. This also makes a case of internalized Orientalism offset by radical nationalism. The Kemalists located anxieties about Turkey in the same place as the West did – in Islam. The meeting allows dialogue that does not necessarily result in any denouement, but implants fractures in the master narrative as an interventionist performative that engages critically with the country's political situation.

The chapter 'Women Commit Suicide to Save Their Pride' is subtitled 'Final Act.' Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* improvised into *Tragedy in Kars* brings the people of Kars to watch theatre change their future. Sunay Zaim was by then the most powerful man in Kars and the characters of his play were known to all. This caused excitement in the people just as it scared them. Some were present for compulsory attendance, some were picked up in army trucks and brought in, some came for a fear-filled thrill, while the others watched the play with trepidation on the television. Theatre partakes of life and also exceeds it by exaggerating it and then leaps from the stage to a wider space. Zaim and Kadife, bold personalities who never agreed with each other over anything, come to the stage together. Rumours and expectations make their rounds among the audience. As the readers/audiences prepare to watch Zaim's captivating presence on the stage, they experience theatre as both engagement and entertainment – the kind of fiction the tired people find refuge in for the time being while being apprehensive of the outcome at the same time. As soon as the play begins, we see a debate between Zaim and Kadife where we doubt every moment if the performance had been scripted before or is an urgent improvisation. Ironically, Kadife's and Zaim's roles are quite opposites of their ideologies in life, but each of them as they act 'spontaneously' tries to ensure the victory of her/his purpose in the play. Suicides and headscarves are both central motifs of the play. Kadife appears as a mouthpiece for Zaim, to stage his plans for Turkey. Her stand in all of this remains misty to us till the end – we wonder if her enthusiasm for the headscarf was prompted by her own ideological position or dictated by her lover Blue. Further, the novel suggests at one level that Kadife shot Zaim dead on the stage acting outside the plot of the play. At another, we know that a newspaper report had been published prior to the show, announcing Zaim's death on stage. Possibilities are that Kadife seized the opportunity provided by the report to avenge Blue's death in the hands of the secularists.

Pamuk ends the novel in its original state of confusion. The audience in the novel's theatre and the readers of the novel are both left with questions and doubts unresolved. The text demonstrates the inseparable and therefore sometimes incomprehensible relationship between life and theatre, between real-life action and onstage acting – performativity informing both at the end. Death is the greatest inscrutable 'performance' in Zaim's theatre that perhaps no longer remains merely his. A slap is represented in a play by a theatrical act of slapping, a fall by a fall. There is a mimetic correspondence between external and stage reality in the theatre. But death, in this novel's theatre, fuses fiction and reality – conflating the two eventually. Did Sunay Zaim plan his death and prepare all his life to mount an artistically unflawed presentation, and not representation, of it on the stage? Or did it happen without his plans? The audience half expects him to get up and deliver a monologue after the shooting. We don't know for sure whether Kadife killed him out of revenge or unknowingly, accidentally. In any case, this is a performance without a conventional plot or 'truthful' acting; in fact, the very elements of conventional theatre stand challenged here. Whether the bloody feud on the stage is real or passed off as real as in an illusionist theatre, theatre remains suspended between truth and fiction in the absence of veracity in favour of either. Life and theatre meet in a power play that unsettles all assumptions.

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# An Analytical Study of Vampire as a Psychological and Cultural Metaphor in Suzy McKee Charnas' *The Vampire Tapestry*

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## *Abstract*

*The vampire as a mythical as well as a literary figure has undergone a multitude of transformations that have expanded its significance as a cultural metaphor. The paper seeks to investigate how the vampire figure in Suzy Mckee Charnas' The Vampire Tapestry is unlike any other rendition of the literary vampire that we have seen, the major difference being the vampire having been stripped of its supernatural baggage. The paper also talks about how the vampire serves as a medium for the other characters in this design of five novellas to explore their own identities and memories, and how it itself comes to terms with its own changed psychological and cultural reality. It becomes interesting to study how this vampire serves to be a metaphor to represent the postmodern peculiarities of the contemporary man and the contemporary world.*

*Keywords: Vampire as a Cultural Metaphor, Identity, Psychological Vampire Fiction, Postmodern Vampire.*

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## **Introduction**

There's no denying that monsters are heavily cultural not just in their creation but also in their implications and the vampire is no exception. The vampire myth (i) has been given numerous makeovers, especially in the last couple of decades and has been constantly generating new allegorical significations. (Gelder 12) The vampire usually has been considered to be representative of not just sexuality, but also as a mode to sketch out more definite current issues such as rootlessness and estrangement, queer or the outsider, relation between power and knowledge, outlook towards illness or disease and delineation of good and evil. From being abhorred as ghoulish, predatory, shape-shifting cadavers in cult renditions like F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* to being adored as groovy, polished and vegetarian samples of supernatural perfection, the figure of the literary vampire has come a long way and so has the genre of vampire fiction. Right from the philosophical musings of the vampires of Anne Rice's *The Vampire Chronicles* to the feminist stances of the lesbian vampires in the narrative fiction of Latin America to the concerns that the vegetarian vampires of *The Twilight Saga* express over mortality, free will, power and family, the trend of reconstructing, revisiting and deconstructing the figure of the vampire vis-à-vis the society that it represents or inhabits has come to occupy a veritable space of its own in the academic circle as well as contemporary popular culture.

However, Suzy Mckee Charnas' *The Vampire Tapestry*, an intricately woven 'tapestry' of five independent novella-length stories and first published in 1981, stands apart for being

more of a science fiction than yet another reconstruction of myth and phantasm of the vampire, describing a period in the life of a vampire masquerading as eminent anthropologist and academic Dr. Edward Weyland.

### The New and Unusual Vampire

Dr. Edward. L. Weyland qualifies to be quite an unusual vampire owing to the lack of any paranormal baggage with his vampirism being more biological in origin than supernatural. He immortal, can walk in brilliant summer sunlight and isn't averse to crosses and crucifixes. A well-known anthropologist who studies Dream Mapping, he is more than sufficiently aware that he is rather an evolved variety of the human species (a mutant perhaps) or an alien life form altogether, who is able to view himself as well as others with a much more scientific temperament. It is due to his particular reason that *The Vampire Tapestry* is more than often said to belong to the genre of science fiction instead of mythology. Simply put, he is a highly advanced predator who reboots himself periodically. He lives out a certain period of lifetime and then withdraws into a hibernation where the remotest of vestiges of the past lifetime are wiped from his memory except in the vaguest of senses. In some ways, he personifies the everlasting probability of new beginnings.

He's probably better equipped and qualified to be an anthropologist than any human because of the sheer span of his life that would extend much beyond that of the latter. During one of his lectures on the university campus where he works, his thoughts on "How would nature design a Vampire" provide an alternate, anatomically justifiable and hitherto unheard hypothesis about the biological, societal and cultural and even political propensities of a vampire. These musings set Weyland as well as this tapestry comprising of his journey, apart from anything else that we as readers have heard, read and seen about this predatory creature from the mythical lore:

The vampire's slowed metabolism helps extend his lifetime... his bite wouldn't turn his victims into vampires like himself, he isn't a contagious disease after all...Fangs are too noticeable and not efficient for bloodsucking...may be some sort of puncturing device, perhaps a needle in the tongue like a sting that would secrete an anti-clotting substance.( *The Vampire Tapestry* 36)

Very deftly, Mckee Charnas characterizes her vampire pretty close to a non-romanticized, non-demonized, smart and advanced alien form, with his life carefully sorted out into precise phases, his predatory stance being nothing but an extension of the desire to sustain his own self as nature intended it to, and hence absolutely normal. She also very smartly comments on our world being worn down by polarization of political views, with the forced necessity to subscribe to one or the other, the vampire however being smart enough to avoid it:

While he must adapt sufficiently to disguise his anomalous



existence, he must not succumb to current ideologies of Right or Left – that is, to the cant of individual license or the cant of the infallibility of the masses – lest either allegiance interfere with the exercise of his predatory survival skills. (*The Vampire Tapestry* 37)

### The Postmodern Element

Throughout the novel, Weyland serves as a potent metaphor for postmodernism, because through him the fantastic transforms into the realism that we comprehend. One of the most concise and influential definitions of Postmodernism is Jean Jean François Lyotard's concept of "incredulity towards metanarratives" - this simply means disbelief in "totalizing stories such as Capital- H History, Capital- S Science and Capital -R Religion," which eventually is partly responsible for the "legitimation crisis" (qtd. in *Blood Read* 199) that interrogates the very foundations on which the edifices of so many normative human behaviors and beliefs have previously been secured. All erstwhile boundaries - political, ethical, philosophical, and conceptual- have all tended to become problematized.

In its very conception, instead of being one grand narrative, *The Vampire Tapestry* is a medley of mini narratives which are conditional, temporary, relative and provisional and which provide a foundation for the actions of particular groups in specific local circumstances, where their common link is Weyland, the vampire, who has as many truths as the people he encounters. The plurality of perspective with respect to how each character forms his own relative, subjective and contextual opinion of Weyland's vampiric reality, reflects the core postulate of postmodernism.

Weyland is deeply impressed by the unfamiliar experience of being seen through someone else's eyes - Floria's and this shoves him into an introspective analysis, which not only serves to be a projection of the imminent cultural and societal nuances of human habitation as a whole but also makes him realize that there is no absolute truth to his existence and the worlds that he wakes up in. The author resonates his skepticism and anxiety as she touches upon various critical, contemporary concerns through Weyland. He wonders if owing to the technology that humans have at their disposal, he would one day wake up to find everything except himself mechanized. His stability is hard earned, like that of "a gay man in straight world." (*The Vampire Tapestry* 163) He also comments how it's easier to prey on gay men because they "are denied the full protection of the human herd" (*The Vampire Tapestry* 137). Flouting the "tablet of the law" (*The Vampire Tapestry* 261) about who gets to sleep with whom, they are outcasts themselves who won't be able to effectively accuse him even if they see through his vampire self. In a world where palatable water is as rare as healthy blood and environmental issues are restricted to customized merchandise, Weyland mulls over religion as a tool of control and suppression. Having no dreams of his, but knowing all about those of humankind, Weyland is able to clearly identify the tendency of humans to want to escape "the weight of their past," (*The Vampire Tapestry* 245) even if it is through living in delusions. He acknowledges that the world with skepticism, uncertainty

and confusion does not necessarily be agonizing. Piece by piece, the postmodern stance of Weyland gets stronger as he himself becomes obsessed with questions about life and death, self and other, binaries and flux.

### **The Vampire as a means to explore Identity and Memory**

The psychological potency of *The Vampire Tapestry* is distinctive – the novel is all about interiors. One of the prominent results of the previously mentioned crisis of legitimation is the recent widespread movement of decentering, Weyland being a prime example. The simultaneity of the vampire lying inside and outside culture endows it with the power to subvert that which is dominant, whether by fitting seamlessly into society or by celebrating being exiled from it. Weyland, who is not bound by humanist simplification or standard stereotyping, serves to be the decentered cognizance through which the other characters are able to radically interrogate their own psychological realities.

In chapter I, “The Ancient Mind at Work”, Katje de Groot is a fifty year old, white south-African expatriate; she's as complicated as Weyland herself, with as many shades of grey as the vampire. Her identity has always been in a state of limbo. Nothing clear comes to her mind, whether it is about her connection to Africa or conflicted ideologies. Just like “nothing on film could be like her Africa,” (*The Vampire Tapestry* 33) similarly Weyland is nothing like the vampires that she had been seeing or reading about – both Katje and Weyland contradict being seen through the prism of generality and homogeneity.

She feels as foreign in her native land not being able to “remember the quality of African Sunlight that she's grown up in” as she does in homeland “never getting used to the chill, watery winters” (*The Vampire Tapestry* 16). Her memory flashes of hailing from a German speaking European family settled in colonial East Africa are unsolicited and unpleasant. Weyland seems to as rootless to her as she herself is – “a one-way time traveler” (*The Vampire Tapestry* 42) with their social identities being superficial and unrelated to the conflicted identities that they are carrying within themselves. By virtue of being a vampire, Weyland provides her that key to identifiability in an unknown land; she finds in him not just the same vulnerability but also the same strength to brave the odds; ironically, it is this will to subsist that eventually makes her shoot Weyland in self-defense when he tries to prey upon her which leaves her with a pleasant realization - a realization of home:

She would go home to Africa...a new life...If Weyland could fit himself to new futures, so could she. She was adaptable and determined – like him. (*The Vampire Tapestry* 51)

Mark in chapter II “The Land of Lost Content” is a sensitive, responsible boy of fourteen torn by an abusive and broken household; he has a demeanor that exudes nurturing. It doesn't take long for him to empathize with the powerless vampire in captivity, who seems to mirror his own lonely and hapless situation with respect to his experiences with family, friends and society in general – they've both been made into “humiliating jokes” (*The Vampire Tapestry* 62) and just like he's taught himself to rise above

victimization, he “doesn't want the vampire to obtain favors by just looking weak and pathetic” (*The Vampire Tapestry* 59). Mark seems to be a misfit in the self-centered, unfeeling space that Roger's apartment is. Stuck in the chaotic turmoil of memories of his broken family that continually haunt him, Mark finds the company he craves for in Weyland. Night after night, Mark tells him about his days at school, stories from “*Childhood's End*, *The Mysterious Island*, and a few of Ray Bradbury's.” (*The Vampire Tapestry* 68) The vampire seems to provide that vicarious paternal warmth that Mark's life lacks; in fact he keeps slipping in and out of the role of a friend, mentor and parent - whether it is about helping him with homework or giving positive and scientifically viable feedback on Mark's blueprint of Skytown, the one-man space station (a dream as improbable as the vampire's aspiration to be free) or just appreciating him for who he is.

Mark detests unnecessary and capitalistic voyeurism – preferring “animals stuffed in museum exhibits or on film to seeing them in a zoo” (*The Vampire Tapestry* 82). He is painfully affected by a deliberately starved Weyland being tortured to be made into “a spectator sport,” (*The Vampire Tapestry* 95) with people being charged admission fee to come and watch him feeding on volunteers. These voyeuristic tendencies of the visitors are a petrifying insight into not just the community that's obsessed with wreaking brutality on the 'misfits', but also a commentary on consumerism where those with power indulge in limitless strategies to make the community believe that a non-human like Weyland deserves to be the guinea pig for gratifying their seemingly endless appetite for vicious ferocity and carnage.

In the spectacle that Weyland is made into, one can see flashes from the history (past as well as ongoing) of colonized countries and suppressed minorities across the world, where the natives are labelled as savages and oddities, subjected to sadistic treatments, made to live in callous and inhuman circumstances, used as props to satisfy the violent whims of the colonizers/tyrants and killed without a thought. He becomes much more than a vampire – he becomes a manifestation of gruesome oppression.

Mark is able to foresee that the Satanist, Alan Reese is going to kill Weyland for his lust of supernatural power, which isn't something that Weyland even has. It is at that time that Mark spots fear in Weyland's chilly eyes - the fear of one's identity being forcibly decided by others to suit their own purpose, which echoes the sad dread in his heart of having been caught in a web of designated roles that has made him an unwilling accomplice to such inhumane practices. It seems as if Roger's Manhattan apartment is Mark's real-life Skytown, with Mark being the pivot. In pulling the vampire back from the verge of imminent death and playing a major role in setting him free, Mark himself sets forth to return to his parents and face his most uncomfortable and unavoidable challenge, similar to Weyland who also sets out, yet again, to fight the battle of his existence every single day – both go back “the culture that treats [their condition] as a disadvantage...and make a strength of that weakness” (*The Vampire Tapestry* 109).

## **Performances versus Realities**

Dr. Floria Lauder in the third chapter titled "Unicorn Tapestry" is the therapist who tries to treat Weyland's supposed delusions of being a vampire but seems to be ironically at a loss to work out anxieties regarding her own feelings and the effects that the experiences and traumas of her clients have on her. She feels envious of Weyland who is able to "keep the predator and prey distinct" (*The Vampire Tapestry* 138) despite having empathy for the prey. She feels as if "the new client, running from his vampirism exposed her own desire to retreat" (*The Vampire Tapestry* 122). Weyland's therapy sessions with Floria gradually swell into detailed explanations of his hunting routines and views on humanity and much more –they become Weyland's road to self-discovery, something that had never crossed his mind earlier. He begins to feel a little empathetic towards humans, who until then, he had regarded merely as a food source. The reality of his performance as a predator who can't empathize with the prey, thus gets transformed radically.

This need for discovering one's identity and true self is mirrored in Floria too, not just through her association with the vampire but also through her relationship with her daughter, who herself is subjected to a tormented marital life. Weyland becomes the whetstone to measure Floria's capability for self-sustenance and self-assurance. He accuses her of "seducing him into quarrelling with the terms of his own existence" (*The Vampire Tapestry* 143) even though they're not normative enough and probably that's what she has been subjecting herself to as well. Floria realizes that "vampirism isn't a defense that he has to learn to drop...it's the core of his identity...an undistorted necessity...that commands him in entirety" (*The Vampire Tapestry* 155). Weyland prods her to drop the façade of curing others while her own identity as a person, a mother, a lover and a therapist is clouded by confusion. He encourages her to unleash "her inward choreographer" that she has been holding down, to follow the "uncluttered responses of her instinct" (*The Vampire Tapestry* 159) and "being her own authority" (*The Vampire Tapestry* 159) in a world where she is as unique as the vampire. Weyland seems to have stumbled upon the root of human misery when he says:

I am part of the world. I listen to the pain. You people [humans] claim to be above all that. You deafen yourself with your own noise and pretend there is nothing else to hear. Then these screams enter your dreams and you seem therapy because you have lost the nerve to listen. (*The Vampire Tapestry* 160)

Weyland's performance as an anthropologist is closely related to his identity as a vampire. He knows why he is a vampire, and each mistake he makes becomes a part of the grand design. Floria realizes that everyone has a "personal land of lost content" (*The Vampire Tapestry* 53) and she just needs to come to terms with hers.

Weyland also discovers new facets to himself in the fourth chapter titled "A musical Interlude." He realizes that art affects him, a predatory monster. A performance of Puccini's opera *Tosca* makes him reach into the raw animal instinct within him, that he had forgotten about. With its scenes of violence, gore, battles, murder and conspiracy killings, the act on the stage becomes an external manifestation of the central reality of Weyland's

life – hunting. The “studied ease of the hunter and the pretended calm of the prey” (*The Vampire Tapestry* 203) fascinates him as this theatrical rendition becomes as lethal in Weyland's mind as his vampiric tendencies. The drama progresses and so does Weyland's first ever needless kill. He wonders if “art [can] raise appetite to the level of passion” (*The Vampire Tapestry* 221) making them indistinguishable. It also warrants the question if all art is someone's performance and someone else's reality. “Human music, human drama, human voices” (*The Vampire Tapestry* 223) create a perilous pattern that makes him curious if he was growing more human than he wanted to, becoming more vulnerable to their works and their art.

He realizes that he's capable of softer emotions and that with each cycle of hibernation, his mind was wiped clear of the preceding life because there was no way he could have survived “the details of an enormous past heavy with those he cared for” (*The Vampire Tapestry* 284). When he talks about the dangers of “art, dreams and history brought too vividly to life in human speech” or ponders on “grief piled on grief through centuries of loss” (*The Vampire Tapestry* 284), he seems to be dipping into every revolution, every struggle for sustenance and every oppression that the world has seen. The novel ends with Weyland slipping into another hibernating cycle and ending his masquerade amongst humans, “who deserved more from him than disdain” (*The Vampire Tapestry* 283).

According to Joseph Campbell (ii), “whether you call someone a hero or a monster is relative to where the focus of your consciousness may be”. A new, postmodern vampire like Weyland, indulging in his global quests across modalities of time and place, neatly fits the 'Hero Model' that Joseph Campbell talks about:

The hero's journey is neither an act of courage nor that of the aggrandizement of the hero. It is a life lived in self- discovery. This kind of unintended adventure, into which the hero has been thrown...evokes qualities of his character that he hadn't known he possessed. (*The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 98)

### Notes

- i) The vampire myth comprises certain distinct characteristics of the vampire as mythical figure.
- ii) *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell, pg. 127. Campbell says that when we are able to think beyond self-preservation, we undergo a truly heroic transformation of consciousness that is central to the human experience.

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**Gebreyesus Hailu's *The Conscript*: An Eritrean Saga of Suffering  
Under the Colonial Set-up**

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*Abstract*

*This paper is a modest endeavour to trace the emotional, psychological, social, and political change that occurs in the attitude and outlook of the novel's protagonist when he undergoes several traumatic experiences during his journey to Libya as a conscript. The Conscript, a canonical and path breaking text in the history of Eritrea, deals mainly with the repercussions and ramifications of the Italian colonial yoke that sucked the Eritrean life-blood with multifold methods of exploitation not only by draining wealth and resources but also by conscripting youths to fight in Libya against patriotic Arabs who were defending their native land from the onslaughts of marauding Italians. The novel is a spiritual, mental and physical odyssey of a young man named Tuquabo, who goes through various trials, tribulations, frustration, mortification, repentance and disenchantment--beginning with euphoria and ending with disillusionment and loss. Tuquabo, with the passage of time, encounters shocking events and the blatant Italian racism and undergoes a sea change which metamorphoses his attitude towards war and colonial rule.*

*Keywords: conscription, disillusionment, colonial, anticolonial, Habesha.*

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*The Conscript* (1927), originally written in Tigrinya language by Gebreyesus Hailu, an Eritrean priest, theologian, and a famous literary and public figure, translated into English by Ghirmai Negash in 2012, is a canonical and path breaking text in the history of Eritrea which deals mainly with the repercussions and ramification of the Italian colonial rule that sucked the Eritrean life-blood with multifold methods of exploitation not only by draining wealth and resources but also by conscripting the Eritrean youth to fight in Libya against patriotic Arabs who were defending their native land from the onslaughts of marauding Italians. The novel is pregnant with proverbs, sayings, folklores, songs, oral tradition, parallelism, paradoxes, irony, anecdotes and various literary devices which make it a mature and complex piece of literature, thus giving it the status of one of Eritrea's literary masterpieces. The novel opens with a well known fictional technique known as *in medias res*, the story shuttles between Eritrea and Libya, the well-controlled narrative moves forward and backward, looking forth and back like Janus, and the plot unfolds different nuanced dimensions of the Eritrean life under colonial rule. It is the dexterity of the writer's fictional craft that he does not explicitly evince a direct clash between colonizers and the colonized, oppressor and the oppressed; rather he makes the colonized part of colonizers' design of

exploitation, making both the parties responsible for the plight of the oppressed and the exploited. Laura Chrisman lauds this novel in her brilliant introduction to the same novel, as "Hailu's work is startling for its openly anticolonial stance, modernist style and international subject matter, Italy's use of Eritrean soldiers in its war of Libyan conquest.(xvii).

The novel is a spiritual, mental and physical odyssey of a young man named Tuquabo who goes through various trials, tribulations, frustration, mortification, repentance, and disenchantment- beginning with euphoria and ending with disillusionment and loss. The protagonist encounters shocking events and the blatant Italian racism and undergoes a sea change which metamorphoses his attitude towards war and colonial rule. An intelligent, well-built, well off, and the only child of elderly parents, Tuquabo is full of admiration for chivalry, heroism, weaponry, military exploits, adventure and bravery. Like other Eritrean youths of the time, he joins the Italian army as a conscript to prove his prowess against the will of his parents, leaving their "faces worry-stricken, their eyes hollow, and their brows skinny" (Hailu: 3). The heroic atmosphere of the country and pride in *Habesha* race spur his decision to leave his parents and to fight for the colonial forces in a foreign country: "This was the time when there was war going on in Tripoli, and it was deemed fitting for the people of *Habesha* to be willing to spill their blood in this war. The youth were singing, "He is a woman who refuses to go to Libya," and small children in return sang, "Come back to us later Tribuli . . . give us time to grow" . . . Tuquabo was listening to all these" (7). His parents implore him to stay with them: "You were our light and joy. We feel orphaned. Why do you wish to fight for a foreigner? What use is it for you and for your people to arm yourself and fight overseas? You have all you want, why?" (8). But he gives a deaf ear to all the pleadings of his parents and in an emotional scene at Asmara railway station; he leaves them in the lurch and boards a train with many other conscripts to fight against the Libyans in the battle of Tripoli. Thus, Tuquabo embarks on his enlightening journey which, through many ups and downs, leaves him emotionally shattered but politically awakened.

At Asmara railway station, the contemptuous attitude of the Italians towards the *Habesha* is evident as they treat the latter like animals; beat the crowd that has thronged to see the conscripts off: "the military police would intervene and beat them with a whip (yes with a whip like a donkey)" (12). The Italian soldiers are not only callous and cruel to the crowd but they also put the conscripts in trucks and then in the train like animals. When the conscripts are ordered to board the train, the crowd becomes impatient to see them for the last time and who knows whether they will come back alive or not, "The noise of the crowd intensified, and the military police started beating people again. The wailing and screaming grew even louder. It was heard everywhere. There began a stampede, and many women fell, with no one to help them up"(12). The station was a complete pandemonium with crying, sobbing, screaming, wailing, stampede and beating "while women sang together a melancholy song, "The train comes smoking and your mothers' daughter is crying." With the train station still filled with a frenzy of a sobbing and wailing public, the confusion and disturbance were beyond imagining" (12). This is Tuquabo's first experience with the brutality of the atrocious colonial government.

The conscripts are put in a ship at Massawa bound for the Libyan port of Derna. The



conscripts start feeling the biased attitude of the Italians as they are not given a proper and safe place in the ship: "The Italian officers seated themselves on an upper deck apart from the rest. As for the *Habesha*, they were stationed in the open, where there is no shelter from the sun's heat and rain, a place where you put your animals" (14). The racial discrimination, the feeling of nostalgia and the love for native land make Tuquabo sad at heart and he starts thinking of his parents and homeland in a pensive mood. "Tuquabo was deep in thought, far away from the world of singing and dancing. From the deck of the ship, he looked back towards his land. Thoughts of his mother and father dominated his mind, and Tuquabo saw Massawa running away from him" (14). A sense of repentance, dejection, homesickness, guilt, frustration and anger overtakes him. He feels emotionally stirred up when he sees his native land moving away. He is angry at his own decision of joining the Italian army and leaving his mother, father and the native land. So even before reaching Libya, Tuquabo starts feeling a sense of futility regarding war and heroism which is the beginning of his metamorphosis. At Port Sudan the *Habesha* conscripts come across dark and huge Sudanese who think of the Eritreans as "These slaves! They are going to Tribuli for Money!" which adds insult to the injury. It is a powerful attack on self respect of Tuquabo and his company.

By the time the conscripts reach Derna, Tuquabo is almost half disenchanted regarding their purpose of arrival: that is to fight against the Libyans. Being tired with the voyage, the conscripts fall asleep and an anonymous internal voice warns them: "You need rest, for; there is great work and hardship awaiting you in this hot country. The Arabs are watching from the horizon and telling each other, 'Did you see the *Habesha* dog who sold his life for money! Let him be.' Beware *Habesha*; the Arabs are not your enemies. Will you be able to recognize your true enemy?" (21). The ordeal for the *Habesha* begins due to hostile climate and people, unknown country "surrounded by sand, stone, gravel, and heaps of dust" (23-24). They understand that they are caught between the devil and the deep sea. "The sense of shock, sadness, helplessness and regret was clearly visible on their faces. The view of the desert was overwhelming. There was not a single tree or blade of grass, not to speak of water" (23). They feel disheartened because they see nothing besides the boundless expanse of desert. "Not even a single chirping bird was heard, nor was a bird in flight seen in the desert. With the open cloudless sky, it was like a hot oven" (24). The sand feels like a glowing fire with craters of hot ash everywhere. (24) Out of a sense of regret, nostalgia, fear, frustration and anger all the conscripts say: "I deserve this for wanting to come here!" (24). They are in such a terrible situation that they can do nothing except self pity. They start questioning how they will stay for two years in such a devastating heat, in a land of hell, with no trace of water and with such a terrible wind blowing.

They are given orders to move from Derna towards Tripoli. They travel the whole day under scorching sun, with hot wind blowing and their bodies sweltering and they rest in the evening. They are completely exhausted and their feet are burning with blisters and wounds. They sleep on the land without any carpet or cloth. The *Habesha* suffer and the Italian commanders live in luxury. On the other hand "for the Italian commanders who rode on mules for the whole day, a tent was put up to protect them from night cold and sandstorms. Their beds were prepared, and water was readied for them" (25-26). And all these facilities are given to the commanders by the conscripts only. "It was also the *Habesha*

who were despicable to the Italian mind" (26). The conscripts continue walking for seven days to reach Tripoli. They are hungry, thirsty and tired, enduring blistering heat and sandstorms. When they reach near the territory of the Arabs, their commander delivers a short speech to brief them about the Arabs which turns out to be a derogatory remark about the *Habesha* also as the commander says that the *Habesha* should be gratified and privileged for fighting under the Italian banner and that the Italian government is great with ships, trains, guns, rifles and aeroplanes and that the Italians are the master of the *Habesha* and all the spoils belong to the Italians only, and that the *Habesha* dare not touch it, however, they will be given something to eat. This speech belittles and marginalizes the *Habesha* conscripts reducing their position to mere slaves and mercenaries. But the commander "forgot that he was addressing the *Habesha*, who, unlike some other Africans, who didn't have pride in their history and land, had a long history of resistance, and, moreover were endowed with honesty of heart and depth of mind. He forgot that the *Habesha* soldiers were fighting because they sought bravery and heroism, not for the sake of a few pennies" (28). The speech completely shatters and disillusiones the conscripts and they feel ashamed when they look at the Bedouin shepherds who are preparing to "fight the black mercenaries, the Massawa slaves" (29) and to defend their homeland against the heavy odds as lack of guns, ammunitions and leaders. "On the other hand, it was strange to watch the *Habesha*, who at first did nothing when their land was taken and bowed to the Italians like dogs (as if that were not shameful enough indeed), preparing to fight those Arabs who wanted to defend their country. The *Habesha* were fighting for those who came to colonize and to make others tools of colonizing African neighbors, without anything of benefit to their country or society" (29).

The Italian propagated a bad stereotyped image of the Arabs that they were indolent, treacherous, merciless killers that "to say that an Arab would respect a deal would be to lie" (32). But Tuquabo realizes that the Arabs are not as bad as they were projected by the Italians. "They were very diligent in upholding their religion. They never missed their prayer for any reason" (32). Tuquabo sees that the Arabs are hospitable, brave and love their freedom, ready to stake their lives for the sake of their country. They are not indolent at all; they start girding up their lions when they are told that "an alien army was coming to attack them" (35). They are ready for the fight "Waving their swords, they vowed not to be mentioned as men, if they didn't spill the blood of "those dogs." They were even murmuring to their horses that they were to have the blood of Christians for the lunch" (36). They attack the *Habesha* conscripts to protect their country from infidels, give a tough fight but are defeated ultimately. Many *Habesha* soldiers are also killed and the novelist sarcastically remarks that the victory went to the Italians: "And so it ended with full victory for the *Habesha*. No, I am wrong. It was for the Italians" (40).

Tuquabo stands out to be a hero of the battle and all praise his marvellous display of bravery. But he is singled out to be a night guard where standing alone on night duty, ponders over his decision to join the Italian army and fight against the Arabs who were ready to sacrifice their lives to defend their barren land. "The Arabs fight for this barren land. And us? A curse be upon us! We didn't do anything when the Italians came to take our fertile land...and now we are supporting them to conquer this land. We lost our country, and we are extending our hands to colonize other lands. How would the Arabs be fighting

if they had as good a land as ours? (41-42).

Tuquabo deliberates that the Arab being Nomadic could have moved to other place leaving this unfertile land to the Italians. But they were true patriots; they did not bow down before the foreign rule and they remained true to their country. He further muses that "the *Habesha* with all their heroic deeds and loyal among themselves would have been useful if all they did was for their land, not for the benefit of the strangers for whom they worked as mercenaries in a strange land" (43). The lamentation of Tuquabo is the outcome of his frustration and shock at his decision of leaving his country for the ungrateful Italians who treated the conscripts with disdain.

The journey after the victory against the Arabs proves to be disastrous and fatal for the *Habesha* conscripts. They are ordered to make a move back towards Derna. They are, hungry, thirsty and exhausted. The Italians have water for themselves, but the conscripts are not allowed to touch it. As the narrative unfolds their condition was worse than a dog: "It was exactly like watching a dog whose eyes, while one is eating, are raised and lowered following the movement of one's hand. They were, after all, like dogs if you compared them with the Italians. In fact, dogs fared better; they at least ate their masters' leftovers" (45-46). Starved and dehydrated their lips parched, throats dry, eyes dull, faces ashen, eyelids covered with dust they look like phantoms. Many of the conscripts fall and die of thirst on the way "dark blood flowing from their noses" (46-47), thus becoming "food for the vultures" (47). When the unscrupulous Italian commander-in-chief sees this miserable condition of the *Habesha*, he disappears on his mule fearing lest they should revolt against him and kill him: "But for the Italians the *Habesha* was like a weak donkey, which you couldn't kill for meat or hide and therefore would leave behind to die in the field under God's hand. The cowardly Italian, who gained his pride and fame from the strong young *Habesha*, thus escaped when he knew they were weakened and dying of thirst. But for him they were mercenaries; they had been bought any way" (47).

Abandoned by the Italian commander, the conscripts are in a state of confusion, lost in the wilderness, not knowing where to go and how to save their lives, thus moving aimlessly like a rudderless boat. They head towards different directions; some of them fall into the hands of the Arabs and the corpses of some of them are lying here and there like dry leaves to rot there in an alien land. It is a pathetic scene. "And the Italian who led them to this and made this happen was going to have a good night's sleep in his homeland. Nothing was going to happen to him. Everything worked well for him" (48).

Tuquabo's group is lucky enough to chance upon a well and with great difficulty they fetch the water from the well with the help of a rope and quench their thirst. They are also chased by the Arabs up to the sea shore. They take the ship for their homeland and on the way they are grieving the loss of their brothers who lost their lives in the battlefield. Disillusioned they sing mournfully: "Let no one go to Tripoli, lest they be cut with long knife and sword" (48). Anyhow they reach Massawa, where they are happy to see "the brown people like them carrying loads" (52). A train takes them from Massawa to Asmara where they again witness the cruelty of the railway guards who beat the crowd like animals. "The crowd

seemed like growling sheep or goats which ran about to fetch their little ones bucking and hitting anything on their way, while the little lambs moaned and jumped to find their mothers. There was noise, chaos, tears, and calling out of names on all sides as people fought to find their loves ones" (54). This is again a terrible and heart-rending sight.

Nobody comes to receive Tuquabo. He reaches home alone and, to his shock and dismay, finds his father bed-ridden and mother died right before his arrival. As pain and sadness tug at his heart he considers himself responsible for his mother's death, bursts into a dirge with a broken heart which mouths his sense of disillusionment, betrayal, contrition, anguish, futility and despondency at his decision of becoming a conscript in the thankless Italian army. The dirge is the culmination of disappointment and regret which leads him to give an explosive expression to his unfathomable anguish:

Going to a distant land,  
Not for the honour of my homeland  
Leaving my family behind,  
In agony and tears, for two years  
And knowing I killed my mother to follow my vanity.....

Farewell to arms  
I am done with Italy and its tribulations  
That robbed me off my land and parents  
I am done with conscription and Italian medals  
Farewell to arms! (56-57)

The death of his mother shatters Tuquabo psychologically and ruptures the bubble of his euphoric fascination and passion for the Italian army and heroism. He gets discharged from the Italian army, goes to his village to stay with his father, perpetually haunted by the memories of his deceased mother. The harrowing experiences leave an indelible influence on his body and soul and transform him completely person at the end.

*The Conscript* is a candid and bold anti colonial narrative. Apart from being the trenchant commentary on the evils of colonial rule, Gebreyesus Hailu does not spare the *Habesha* who are a cog in the colonial machinery, and he avers explicitly that the local sycophants are as much responsible for the Italians occupation of Eritrea as the crafty colonial power itself. By placing the portrayal of the protagonist, Tuquabo in the midst of excruciatingly soul wrenching colonial system, the novelist demonstrates his metamorphosis from an enthusiastic votary of the colonial power to a disillusioned, dejected and enlightened young man, thus highlighting the motive that love for and devotion to one's homeland and its people is of paramount importance and the fascination for heroism and the colonial powers ultimately leads to shock, dismay and disillusionment.

Through the bitter experiences of Tuquabo, the novelist depicts that the colonial rule is the root cause of suffering for the natives and there is no substitute for self-rule and loyalty to

one's homeland.. The colonial powers always exploit the native people for their vested interests and the novelist envisages that there will be a clash between the colonizer and the colonized one day. Christine Matzke comments aptly: "*The Conscript* is not only a many-sided novel in theme, form and context; it is also a visionary text, in that it anticipates the worsening of Italian-Eritrean relations in the mid-1930s and projects the eventual failure of the Italian colonial experience" (148). On the political level the novel is a clarion call to awaken the colonized from their slumber of passivity and to break free from the shackles of slavery and the colonial clutches and to push the usurpers out of the native land. *The Conscript*, prophetic in tone and tenor, assumes the form of a global text that focuses on the evils of colonialism and eventual awakening of the natives. It is evident in the painful odyssey of Tuquabo and his heightened sense of awareness of what bedevils the natives.

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**Poetry as a Literary Device in Githa Hariharan's  
*I Have Become the Tide***

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*Abstract*

*Poetry is a way of expression through specialized use of language and rhyme. It is also used by a number of fiction writers in their novel to convey certain ideas in a more effective way. It is used to give certain insights that add to the overall themes of the novel. Indian writer Githa Hariharan has used poetry that is recited and sung by her different characters the novel I Have Become the Tide. This paper is aimed at understanding the motive and effect of her use of poetry in the novel. It examines the poems to understand how they give more insights about personal, social and spiritual life and ideas of characters. The paper discusses how the characters express their ideas about resistance to caste system and institutions through their songs and poems.*

*Keywords: Githa, Hariharan, poetry, resistance, medieval society, contemporary politics*

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Poetry can be used in fiction to advance the theme of the novel and suggest ideas in a more subtle manner for enhanced effect on the reader. It can also be used to show the progress of a character, as evolution of poetry used by characters can be used to understand the state of mind of a character and we can trace progress in this state of mind through their poetry. This internal state of mind is influenced by many external and social factors and the characters respond to them in their own way. Githa Hariharan has used poetry to depict life and ideas of characters in her fiction. In the novel, *The Thousand Faces of the Night* she quotes the Kannada *vachana* to demonstrate the futility of the feud between the sexes. By narrating mythical stories of Amba she helps Devi fight against injustice and discrimination. Again, in *When Dreams Travel*, Hariharan quotes an epigraph taken from Jorge Luis Borges' *Nightmares*, signifying the plight of women in patriarchal set up. The novelist takes recourse to Charaka and Shakespeare to allude to the prevalence of power relations in every sphere of life. Githa Hariharan's latest novel, *I Have Become the Tide* is rich in verses in the form of songs about the lives and ideas of reform of some medieval characters.

Different writers have used Poetry as a literary device for a number of motives using different techniques according to the requirements of their respective text. There are certain traditional patterns and a few deliberate derivations from tradition when it comes to use of poetry in the selected novels. Hariharan uses poetry as a literary device to achieve a number

of ends. The songs and poems are used to suggest things that are not explicitly mentioned in the novel. The songs start individually from a family but later the whole community contributes to them. The songs individually represent the state of mind and growth of their creator but all these songs combine to jointly represent the philosophy, ideas and growth of egalitarian community depicted in the novel.

Githa Hariharan's use of poetry as a literary device is not limited to just the above aspect but rather she moves beyond to trace the growth of entire community and society through the poems. She makes some intentional repetitions to convey the idea that even after many centuries institutions of the society have some oppressive elements that have remained unchanged. In some poems she makes use of repetition to convey the idea that no matter how oppressive these institutions tend to be, people will gradually grow and their opinions change as they eventually question the rationale behind such institutions. Thus, the resistance will continue until equality and self-respect is achieved.

Besides, poems and songs connect the plot of the novel that shuffles between past and present and these songs and poems connect the medieval narratives with the contemporary ones. These poems also hint as to how art can survive throughout the ages in one form or another and poetry can bring some of best ideas from past to present. These poems convey the idea that one needs to preserve and understand such art from past.

Nature is frequently invoked in the poems. Almost all songs and poems use metaphors from Nature and examples from day to day lives. Hariharan seems to convey the idea that no matter how isolated one is or how limited his or her experiences are, one always needs a way to express. This expression is influenced by experiences and surroundings. So even if one doesn't live in the mainstream society, one can learn from Nature and grow, provided he or she has the right mind-set. No one can control thoughts of others even by isolating them. Through the songs we see that characters grow along with Nature, from elemental desires to reaching spiritual, philosophical and almost existential state.

The songs and poems feature many subtleties which help Hariharan in creating the characters and society in a more vivid manner. Her poems are a meditation on deep relationships of external surroundings with human psyche. She has incorporated some *vachanas* from twelfth century poet and reformer Basava. Basava existed in reality and promoted an idea of ideal society where everyone is equal and people live, work and worship in a simple and pure way. Hariharan made him a character and used his *vachanas* to make readers aware of history of great reformers in medieval India and how the ideas that they promoted centuries ago are still relevant and very much required. In *I Have Become the Tide*, Satya quotes from the poem 'To be or Not to be Born' written by L.S. Rokade. While quoting the poem Satya also mentions about the writer of the poem, in a subtle way, giving credit to the writer. The title "I Have Become the Tide" is taken from poem of J.V. Pawar which was published in *An Anthology of Dalit Literature: Poems* edited by Mulk Raj Anand but only the first line is taken from this poem. The reason for mentioning these poems is to direct the attention of the readers to the richness of Dalit literature which is replete with instances

of pernicious influence of caste system in the society. In one master stroke that speaks of the depth of Hariharan's fictional craft, she encourages and inspires the readers to acquaint themselves with the great literary tradition under the rubric of Indian literature.

Various literary techniques are employed by Githa Hariharan to spin the yarn which has immediacy and relevance to contemporary times. The novel uses flashback, disjointed narratives and seemingly complex way of storytelling which demands a deep investment from the reader. Similarly, the poems and the songs are not directly mentioned rather they need to be connected with other songs and the reader needs to understand and compare them with other songs and poems in the text. They are scattered around in different parts of the novel in a nonlinear manner. The readers have to put them into a sequence to properly understand them. This fragmentation might be her way of dealing with fragmentations and complexity of the contemporary life. As different people contribute in these fragments to create their final form, it can be taken in context of society as well, where each individual contributes to the society. Many songs and poems are intentionally fragmented and repeated to show their complexity and universality.

Apart from this, Hariharan uses a number of metaphors in the poems featured in the novel. Most metaphors are either related to Nature or day-to-day life of characters. Auxter mentions about importance of Nature in rural poetry:

Nature calls to us through metaphor -- progressively enabling us to realize our natural affinities with the world. Hence metaphor is the path in the poetic consciousness that leads to completeness. It fills with life experiences and gives birth to new life, filling the silences and giving to human life its vivid qualities. (Auxter 23)

Hariharan's use of metaphors can be understood at many levels. Our surroundings help us in creating a connection with the universe. As the protagonists lived away from mainstream societies of their times, their interaction with the world was limited and it is subtly suggested by Hariharan through the use of the poems. For example, the symbol of freely flowing water is used extensively. The reason for it is that Chikka and his father were forced to spend their life around a pond for the untouchables. The pond was situated on the edge of their settlement. It provided water for humans and animals to drink and take bath. It is described as being muddy and filled with filth. Therefore, when the characters sing their songs, they always imagine flowing water or river. The reason for it is that they always conveyed their desires and ideas through things that are related to them and important to them. In a way, the things that Hariharan mentions in the poems and songs are deeply related to desires and yearnings of characters and as they sing these songs, one can understand their psychological condition. This bears close resemblance to Shakespeare's soliloquies, which are "superlative moments of psychological insights" (Cousins and Derrin 167). Just like the soliloquies lend an insight into the internal workings of the mind of the speakers, the songs and poetry recited or sung in the novel tell a great deal about the growth curve of the character: what the character is undergoing, how her/his thought-process has



evolved, what the character is contemplating as a future course of action or inaction, the oppression the character is experiencing and so on.

One major theme in the novel is censorship, which is used to distort history and create a knowledge that suits the antagonists of the novels. Michel Foucault's work also calls attention to the role of language and discourse in the exercise and preservation of power. He examines the procedures by which our societies regulate themselves. Each era produces different discourses through which the subject may be objectified according to ruling values, beliefs and interests of its society. What we call the truth is a creation of discourses over a period of time.

Foucault suggests in *Power/Knowledge* that knowledge and power are interdependent and that they are forms of control and the means of organizing subjectivity:

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs throughout the whole social body. (119)

In the novel, the intention of such forces is to keep the life of ancient reformers like Basava or Kannadeva ambiguous. They want to celebrate them as just spiritual Hindu saints and wanted to keep their ideas about reforms in society, religion and caste as indistinct. For them, religious fundamentalism is beneficial while liberal ideas do not suit their agenda. Therefore, to keep their ideas about reform a secret, they attack historians and scholars who try to analyse and understand about life and ideas of reformers from their songs and poetry. Thus, the interpretation and attribution of poetry becomes a major reason of conflict in the novel. Through this, Hariharan delves on the importance of poetry in creating knowledge and history in both real life and literature. These efforts to control knowledge using poetry happen at many levels. The main weapon for this is threat and violence, while attackers also use new ways to influence and promote their ideas. For example in *I Have Become the Tide*, Professor Krishna struggles to know more about poetry that is attributed to Kannadeva. Eventually he gets a palm leaf manuscript of all his poems and comes to know from the songs that he was son of Chikkiah who was a washerman, and Chikkiah himself was the son of a cattle skinner. Professor Krishna also comes to know about his ideas of reform and about Anandagrama. He tries to communicate these ideas of reform and faces many hurdles. First, he gets an anonymous note. "Professor P.S. Krishna re-reads the note that he has just found: *Bastard Hindu hater, making up lies about a saint, you should do suicide before*" (Hariharan 16). A number of methods are used to put pressure on him. He comes into radar of a local godman Guru Santosh who was cunning enough to use this opportunity for his own benefit. He starts questioning Professor's interpretation of the poetry and writings by opposing him in the newspaper, in his sermons, and even asking his followers to issue threats and troll him on internet. Guru Santosh starts by publishing his passive aggressive warning in newspaper by saying:

In a lecture in the town hall last week, he was supposed to describe the uplifting songs and sayings of Saint Kannadeva. Instead, the professor mocked the saint's

verses and songs, saying many of them sound like they were composed by someone else. Even more shocking, the professor mocked the saint by saying he may have committed suicide by drowning in a river. Anyone knowledgeable in such matters knows Sri Kannadeva attained Samadhi in two stages, once in the hoary temple by the Devika river, then in the river itself. It is sad that this professor, who has taught for more than forty years, is still connected to the university even though he has already retired, and will be allowed to continue misleading students and hurting the sentiments of devout Hindus. (Hariharan 17)

When Professor continues his work on Anandagrama and Kannadeva, it angers him even more. To get rid of him, Guru Santosh slowly brainwashes his disciple Srikumar and eventually Professor is killed. What is more pathetic is that some people even tried to justify his death by saying, "Talking about caste all the time, insulting Hindu philosophy. Bad karma caught up with casteist Krishna" (Hariharan 313). Through this story, Hariharan might be hinting at present political scenario where even art is not free from politics and everything is used to create one or another ideology. Hariharan is very vocal about how she conveys her concern about contemporary situation and society through art. In an interview with Tejero, Hariharan says,

Similarly, the context of *In Times of Siege* is the contemporary India I live in. I feel proprietorial about it, and if I can see there is something wrong with it, I am going to shout as loud as I can. Whatever is right in the immediate world around me, I am going to defend as passionately and as clearly as I can. (Tejero 204)

Apart from showing the importance of poetry in the contemporary life, Hariharan also comments about poetic creation of these songs and poems in the novel. In many poems, she conveys the idea that poetry, nature and life has a deep relationship. Our experiences and surroundings inspire us to express through poetry and art. For her, it is both a way of expression as well as of social criticism. It influences all walks of life as we have seen in the novel. It gives the characters confidence and self-knowledge to understand the complexities of existence. It helps them in expressing desires, aspirations and ideas of reform. Mahadevi and Chikka are attracted to each other by hearing songs and poems of one another from far away.

Another important pattern in the poems of both medieval characters and the contemporary characters is that these have some parallels and they work in almost a similar way. It might be Hariharan's way of conveying that while human beings are mortal, their ideas and art continue to live. Poetry and art are inextricably linked with life over different periods of human history and helped people to express basic human instincts in a dignified and civilized way..

As a novel of social realism, *I have Become the Tide* focuses on external events and conflicts within the society but because Hariharan includes poetry in it, it gives us a deeper psychological insight and helps us in better understanding the external events by relating it

to their psychological connotations.

Thus, Githa Hariharan's *I Have Become the Tide* demonstrates very effective use of poetry as a literary device. In order to achieve these ends, she has used some familiar poetic traditions and experimented with contemporary forms as well. In a telling manner she makes these poems a part of life of characters and makes the reader think about the use of poetry and art for creating and controlling certain ideas and knowledge. In this perspective, it almost takes shape of meta-literature. Therefore, the use of poetry as a literary device in the novel works at multiple levels and attracts the attention of the readers about a number of issues of eternal human concern through their experimental treatment.

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## 'Miraculous Heart of the Unknown': Sri Aurobindo's *Rose of God*

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### *Abstract*

*"Rose of God" is a major poem by Sri Aurobindo, which carries forward the tradition of rose symbolism of Yeats's poetry. He enlarges the concept of Rosa Mystica in his poem of multiple layers and in five stanzas of incantatory verse reveals the prayer of humanity for the World Mother to come down on earth to heal the sickness of the earth-consciousness.*

*Keywords: psychic, Jivatma, purushoantartma, sanskritic, mediatrix*

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The rose has been an obsessive symbol in Sri Aurobindo's poetry since his days in Cambridge. Oscar Wilde might have been an influence given the fact that his elder brother Manmohan Ghose was in close touch with the Irish writer. The other immediate tradition was W.B. Yeats, who was one of his favourite poets and who appears more than once in Sri Aurobindo's frame of reference in the *Future Poetry* with regard to incantatory verse. The rose appears with a mystical implication in a cluster of strange love sonnets written in 1901, the year Sri Aurobindo married Mrinalini Devi. There is a detailed discussion on the theoretical aspects of the Rose in K.D. Sethna's *Talks on Poetry*. While expanding the traditional aspect of the Rose as a mediating force, Sethna quotes a conversation between the gardener Parichand and Sri Aurobindo, which is quite interesting and informative. Parichand asked: "Does the rose of all flowers most perfectly and aptly express their divine ecstasies or has it any symbolic allusion in the Veda or the Upanishads?" Sri Aurobindo answered: "There were no roses in those times in India – roses came with Mahomedans from Persia. The rose is usually taken by us as the symbol of surrender, love etc. But here (in *Rose of God*) it is not used in that sense, but as the most intense of flowers; it is used as symbolic of the divine intensities – Bliss, Light, Love etc." (Sethna 148). Sethna further explains:

As regards the five-fold harmony, it is interesting to note that, while the Rose of God is addressed as Bliss, Light, Power, Life and Love, it is invoked first to "leap up in our heart of humanhood", then to "live in the mind of our earthhood", next to ablaze in the will of the

mortal", still next to "transform the body of the mortal" and finally, again a leaping up connected with the heart, though now the appeal is: Arise from the heart of the yearning that sobs in Nature's abyss. (150)

The internal evidences in the sonnets point to Mrinalini as the woman addressed to in the sonnets. The image of the rose appears to denote a mystic woman:

Because thy flame is spent, shall mine grow less,  
 O bud, O wonder of the opening rose?...  
 One month of months when thy sweet spirit awhile  
 Fluttered o'er mine half-thinking to remain.  
 What I could give, I gave thee, to my last breath  
 Immortal love, immovable by death. (179)

Mrinalini was 14 in 1901, hence she was "bud" and "wonder of the opening rose". The phrase "One month of months" indicates their infrequent living together. Sri Aurobindo, then 29, was already busy with the revolutionary works, which forced the couple to stay apart mostly. The mystic rose continues to stay with the poet, which is also a major revelatory symbol in *Savitri: A Legend and Symbol*. The epic was a-growing for about fifty years till the year of his passing in 1950. "Rose of God" was written on 30 December, 1934, when *Savitri* was still incomplete. The mystic rose, *Rosa Mystica*, is equated with the Universal Mother or the miraculous heart of the Unknown both in *Savitri* and "Rose of God".

Sri Aurobindo's poem is a miraculous extension and revelation of the ancient symbol so far half-opened in the history of the earth. It is densely Sanskritic in its symbolic texture and strange intonation and suggestively Aurobindonian in its oblique hint at the power and action of the Universal Mother on earth as an agent of God. The directive verbs, *Leap up, Live, ablaze, Transform and Arise*, are not giving directions to the Rose of God, but appealing to her earnestly to come down on earth, in human life.

Yeats thought of himself as a romantic, indicating not just his roots in the mythical and the occult tradition but also his intense feeling of the Reality seated in his heart, where he sees a living spectacle: the growth of a holy tree. It seems that Yeats is the true interpreter and practitioner of Eliot's half-developed theory of tradition or historical sense, where he forgets about Shakespeare and his "discovered" utterance in poetry, like speeches coming from the Infinite and disappearing into the Infinite indicating only the history of consciousness, like the poetry we see in the Sleep Walking Scene in *Macbeth*: "...the thane of Fife had a wife: where is she now?" The question carries a vast intonation, a suggestion of the infinite creating a sense of sublimity, which is quite often created by Shakespeare with his bare or less decorated lines.

Yeats's poetry lights up the theory of the mythical method. Eliot is possibly trying to mean an objectivized subjectivity, an experience projected through an impersonal poetic mode, but he stretches the point of impersonality too far and moves away from three vital issues relating to the true poetic speech: the direct revelatory speech that goes beyond all analysis, the aspect of music (which he takes up later in 1942) and the absorbing of historical

sense not just by reading books but also through the associations with other human beings. The impression created is a kind of standing apart while the poet expresses his/her subjective utterance. Yeats uses the allusive and the mythical mode with an absolute spontaneity. Unlike Eliot, Yeats and Sri Aurobindo not quote or refer frequently to the myths; they just remind. Yeats takes recourse to the Mask. His poetic practice becomes clear through his own words on life and Art:

I think that all happiness depends on the energy to assume the mask of some other self; that all joyous and or creative life is a re-birth as something not oneself, something which has no memory and is created in a moment and perpetually renewed (Jeffares, 1976:173).

We notice here Yeats's sense of objectivity, the thing which Eliot preaches but is unable to put into practice, most probably because of his remarkable erudition. Yeats also seeks to penetrate into another persona, to recreate himself in another self. The passage is strikingly similar to what Eliot is trying to say in his essay on Tradition and yet it has not that artificiality in that otherwise brilliant essay on the escape from emotion.

There is a deep commitment in the poetry of Yeats and Sri Aurobindo, an involvement in the painful life of others on earth, an entanglement with the miserable earth-consciousness, a spiritual kinship with the poor and the distressed and humanity in general and an effort to feel or heal the agony spread over the earth. And all these help the blooming of the immortal rose in their heart. Whitman, Sri Aurobindo's poetic predecessor, expresses the same love for earth, but he has a colossal sweep of free verse rhythm unlike the restrained tone of Yeats:

I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,  
If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles.  
You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,  
But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,  
And filter and fibre your blood.  
Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,  
Missing me one place search another,  
I stop somewhere waiting for you. (Blodgett 89)

Contrary to the popular belief, Sri Aurobindo is strongly grounded on material life with his deep concern for humanity. Like Whitman and Sri Aurobindo, Yeats has the same love for the suffering earth, but he speaks in a different style, developing a restrained voice, which makes his utterance more pathetic with an authentic feeling of incapacity of changing this earth.

The wrong of unshapely things is a wrong too great to be told;  
I hunger to build them anew and sit on a green knoll apart,  
With the earth and the sky and the water, re-made, like a casket of gold  
For my dreams of your image that blossoms a rose in the deeps of my heart.  
(Jeffares, 2004: 24)

It is this 'wrong of unshapely things', which troubles the nightingale of Wilde and the apparently 'escapist' poet of Pondicherry. Wilde's story of the nightingale brings in the image of the rose with the same symbolic function of a great self-giving. The idea of a motiveless love or sacrifice as a means of improving the condition of the earth links up the two Irish writers with the Indian seer-poet. Yeats is not aware of the psychological name for 'the deeps of my heart'. The Upanishads call it *purushoantaratma*, the individual soul of a person as against *Jivatma*, the soul. Sri Aurobindo names it 'the psychic being', which is the evolving soul of a human individual from birth to birth. The subtle difference is that the soul is static, but the psychic being as soul travels from birth to birth. The psychic being is our deepest conscience, full of love and kindness. It is this that Yeats within his available resources calls 'the deeps of my heart'.

Sri Aurobindo's rose is positive action. The rose is the World Mother, the linking force between the Divine and the human individual, expressing her intense love for the polluted and plundered earth to heal the mistakes of creation. The symbolism of the rose in Yeats's early poetry has been observed by critics, mostly with reference to Ireland, but too insufficiently in the light of integration between the pain of humanity and the inner subjective realization of the poet. Like Sri Aurobindo's rose, the rose of Yeats is a resurrection of an ancient symbol, the mystic Rose or Mother Mary, who was considered as a channeling Grace, a mediatrix between the Supreme Reality and humanity, by the leading Mariologists like Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153 AD). Sri Aurobindo carries the incantatory rhythm ahead of Yeats in his "Rose of God." A look at the whole poem will confirm our claim. Rose of God is synonymous with the Rose of Bliss, Light, Power, Life and Love. The culminating point is the Love of the Universal Mother, which has the real power to change the polluted soil. Hence the call to her in the last two lines:

Arise from the heart of the yearning that sobs in Nature's abyss:

Make earth the home of the Wonderful and life beatitude's kiss. (64)

Sisirkumar Ghose rightly observes: "Here in a peak experience, the root symbols of the Great Tradition resurrect and bloom forever" (47). The phrase "seven-tinged with the ecstasies seven" stands for the joy of being in all the seven lokas, planes of existence, each rendering its tinge to the Rose of God-- *Bhu*, *Bhuvah*, *Svaha*, *Maha*, *Jana* and *Satyam*: earth, water, enlightening *vani*, mighty, creative generation, intuition and the Unchangeable Absolute. Bliss, Light, Power, Life and Love are the five-fold harmonies. The climax comes with the Rose of Love. Iyengar sheds significant light in one sentence: "Bliss, Light, Power, Life, Love are the five essences that fuse as the integral perfection of God" (615).

The "summits of being" indicate the gradations of the supermind, which is not a single plane. Sri Aurobindo himself uses the phrase "highest Supermind" in his book *The Mother*. Gokak calls the poem "an identity with the object" (173). The earth is referred to in every stanza in different names. In the fourth stanza there comes the prayer for bridging earth and heaven. And the final prayer is to invite the Force to occupy the earth-nature

permanently. The Rose, both in Yeats and Sri Aurobindo, is an image of Immortality. The rose residing deep inside our heart is a symbol of the psychic in Yeats's poem. The World Mother's action is in harmony with the Psychic being. The Grace of the Rose opens the Psychic, the *purushaantartma*, our inmost being. The stress on earth lies at the core of integral mysticism or integral spirituality, which takes all life as the field of experience. The old spirituality spoke of a flight towards a distant heaven leaving this suffering planet, even though it was aware of a world pining in pain. The new spirituality in poetry beginning from Whitman and culminating in Sri Aurobindo seeks to marry the soil to the sky.

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## A Psychoanalytical Assessment of Khushwant Singh's Fictional Characters

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### *Abstract*

*Khushwant Singh identified humans as 'sexual beings' and related his observations about their psyche, their willing indulgences in bodily pleasures, and them seeking of carnal attention sans any restraints. They are also seen caught in existential dilemma, torn between their stereotypical gender roles and the claims of individuality. Singh's characters are in perennial conflict with their own selves and their struggle ensues from a sense of moral responsibility on the conscious level and from the self-launched desires to explore, enjoy and escape, at the unconscious.*

*Psychoanalysis of literary characters strives for objective and scientific explanation of the rationale behind their conduct. The present paper draws parallels between Singh's portrayals of his fictional characters. The researchers have adopted interpretive approach to arrive at a conclusive explanation about his interesting rendition of human psychology. The discussion draws strings from certain established psychoanalytic theorists to explicate and understand Singh's depiction of characters' psychic drives and motives.*

*Keywords: Khushwant Singh, Psychoanalysis, The Company of Women, I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale, Jung, Freud*

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### **Conceptual Background: Psychoanalysis**

Psychoanalysis presupposes that an author who comes to creatively criticize life in his work, formulates his propositions based on an individual's psyche, combined with socio-cultural factors that shape it. Wilber Scott in *Five Approaches of Literary Criticism* states that the psychological approach has its origin in "The Freudian judgment – that man is sick rather than villainous" (69). It strives to explore the workings of human mind, both conscious and subconscious. Psychoanalysts are therapeutic in their propositions and attempt to investigate the essential self by lifting the worldly façade behind which the 'self' feels wary of criticism and embarrassments. They believe that the relationship between the author and his work is akin to that of between a patient and his dream, "The critic then becomes the analyst" (72) and his technique psychoanalytic. Eka Mustikawati in her essay, "Psychoanalysis in Literature" observes that the psychoanalytic researcher "should find reason about the behaviour of figure and explain the motivation that supports him/her to perform an act." (Mustikawati). Maslej, Marta M. Oatley, Keith Mar, Raymond A. study the degree of the influence an author exercises over his fictional characters and conclude, "... there is a measurable influence of individual differences on the ability to develop

compelling fictional characters during creative writing” (Maslej). An author's revelations of the psychic processes of his characters are also born out of his own perceptions of reality, his inclinations, suppressed desires, emotional outbursts, apprehensions, prejudices, premonitions, judgments, and other factors. Singh's interactions with people, specifically women, his travels and an eventful career has endowed him with the art of realistic portrayal of human beings. Mark Rubinstein too opines that “The goal is to immerse the reader into the commonality of life experience, establishing oneness with the protagonist's thoughts, feelings, and situation (Rubinstein).

A psychoanalytical enquiry identifies and interprets peculiarities in behavioral traits of fictional characters and justifies their conduct which often resists stereotypes. Psychoanalysis as a tool in literary criticism suffers from some inherent contradictions too. Heins Eyseneck in his *Decline and Fall of the Freudian Empire* (1985) criticizes Freud and argues that psychoanalysis is unscientific. *The Freud Wars* (2005) by Lavinia Gomez is a critical study of the foundation of psychoanalysis and how it can be counted as science. In “Proposals for the Future,” Merton M. Gill (Schill, 363) believes that psychoanalysis needs a radically new perspective based on the previous theories.

The following discussion attempts an incisive analysis of Khushwant Singh's fictional characters based upon certain well researched psychoanalytical propositions. The researchers have adopted an interpretive approach in studying the characters' conduct or behavioural pattern.

### **Exhibitionism, Voyeurism and Mulvian Male Gaze**

Freud in *On Sexuality* argues that the pleasure in looking is an instinct in childhood and it later might develop into 'a burning and tormenting curiosity'(Scopophilia). Further, Laura Mulvey in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” describes women as objects of male gaze. The pleasure seeking impulse also resides in the desire of 'to be seen' by others (59). Mulvey studies the Freudian philosophy of phallocentrism while describing the male gaze. In her essay, she writes that Freud had isolated scopophilia as one of the component instincts of sexuality which exists as the drive quite independent of the erotogenic zones. She also states that Freud associated scopophilia with taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze.

A natural bent towards exhibitionism and voyeurism in humans is irrefutable. A strong desire to be appreciated by others results in exhibitionism. It is a way of expression in trying to attract the attention of others. Exhibitionism and Voyeurism are parallel impulses. Freud in *On Sexuality* observes, “On the one hand these activities are themselves accompanied by pleasure, and on the other hand they intensify the excitation, which should persist until the final sexual aim is attained...This intensifies the excitement of the copulation and is seen to be self-sufficient as they are themselves accompanied by pleasure” (53). He further says, that when the sexual object is appreciated it “tends to involve every sensation derived from it” (53). This explains the tendency behind willingly indulging in

exhibiting one's own self. In *The Company of Women*, Mohan Kumar takes pride in exhibiting his sexual organ to women. Jessica Browne explicitly invites Mohan Kumar with her exhibitionistic instincts, "Want to see what I'm really like?" she asked and "without waiting for answer she slipped off her blouse and skirt" (CW 92). It is a classic instance of exhibitionistic impulses in a woman to become object of 'male gaze' as it is also likely that she herself fantasizes about being seen, observed, and admired, and in the process "a woman welcoming such sexual objectification, by way of the gaze, might be socially perceived as an exhibitionist" (Mulvey 15).

In Khushwant Singh's depiction of women as sexual objects, a male voyeuristic impulse is also discernible. The women in *The Company of Women* are often objects of the male gaze. When Dhanno was moping the floor "Mohan noticed her rounded buttocks separated by a sharp cleavage. He could not take his eyes off her ample behind" (CW 16). Dhanno apparently attempted to seduce Mohan Kumar. In Singh's short story, "A Punjab Pastoral," there is a scene about a scantily attired girl, drawing water from a well, "wore a man's striped shirt. It has no buttons in the front and made a V formation running from her neck down to the middle of her flat belly. On either side, the V was mis-shaped by her youthful breasts" (TPL 62), is gazed upon by a depressed American missionary.

Allan Fromme in *Sex and Marriage* asserts, "Almost everything we do has a sexual characteristic" (67). Fromme also says that physical gratification is not the only expression of sex and it has various other indirect manifestations. Bindo, in Singh's short story, "The Rape" shows exhibitionistic tendencies, 'baring herself from the waist to her neck, letting the cool breeze envelop her belly and her youthful bust' (TPL 73). Dalip, her cousin, cherishes incestuous liking for Bindo, and watches her, "she splashed the water between her thighs, with the other she cleaned herself' (TPL 76). Dalip Singh couldn't control his voyeuristic feeling towards Bindo and "was possessed with a maddening desire" (TPL 76). Champak in *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* is an excessive exhibitionist. When her mother-in-law is busy with her religious prayers, Champak removes all her clothes and looks at herself in the mirror. "Champak's body twisted. She moaned as if in a nightmare and snuggled closer to her husband. She caught his hand and took it lower down her body" (ISHN 89). A more realistic and less idealistic code of conduct that centers on the self has come into being and thrives somewhat blaringly in Singh's portrayals.

### **The Mother Complex**

The image of nurturing, overprotective and self-sacrificing mother often exists at some level of the child's psyche as the ideal mate which Jung terms as the *Anima*, "the unconscious feminine side of a man" ("Anima and Animus"). It guides man to understand the feminine traits and acts as the gateway to access the innermost layers of his psyche. A man is personified along with his feminine traits and it is this *Anima* which makes him complete. Edward Whitmont in his *The Symbolic Quest: Basic Concepts of Analytical Psychology* represents this *Anima* as "the archetype of the man's *Yin* the feminine within him" (185). As the primary caregiver of man, the mother is the first image of his *Anima*. She is "the Virgin Mary and Sophia in Christianity, Kwan Yin in Chinese mysticism, Kali in

Hinduism, Palla Athena in ancient Greece and Fatima in Islam" ("The Archetype of the Anima").

The analysis of mother's psyche in Singh's novels offers a fresh perspective contrary to their stereotypical projections in fiction. Sabhrai, in *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, is a devout woman whose life revolves around her husband, son and daughter. She 'believed that her husband was a God' (ISNHN 194). Sabhrai's family believes that she had intuitions about the future, "She gets to know things that no one else knows" (ISNHN 133). Once she intuitively had returned from her village before schedule, just as her husband was being taken to the hospital for a minor surgery. Her religiosity conjures up an awe which enables her to exercise her hold over others. She emerges as a composite of maternal solicitude, sympathy, authority, wisdom and spiritual exaltation, in other words a superior being. She is protective of her daughter Beena and is concerned about her falling prey to Madan's wiles. Her family believed that "anything that could bother Sabhrai so much was not to be trifled with" (ISNHN 128). Her belief in the Guru reflects her concerns about safeguarding her family. However, understandably, under the garb of an ideal mother resides a woman who yearns for constant attention and a secure future. Her 'excessive mothering' is her attempt to keep her people dependent on her, or rather devoted to her and not abandon her branding as old and worthless.

Sigmund Freud in his *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis* talks about the disadvantages of 'excessive mothering' in terms of child's prelude to the stormy world of adulthood and eventual maladjustment (188). While referring to the dangers of mother-complex in son, Jung in his *Four Archetypes* says that it "injures the masculine instinct" and results in "a revolutionary spirit which strives to put a new face upon the world" (20-21). Sabhrai, through her excessive mothering, bedevils her son's ability to countenance the sordid realities of life. He is nurtured by his mother's encompassing love and starts expecting the same from his wife, Champak, who "gave him an uneasy feeling of being a failure" (ISNHN 192). This drained off the residual vestige of manliness in him. He wanted to impress his wife, yet is bound to the expectations of affection, esteem and admiration, which his mother poured over him since his childhood.

In *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan explains, "Motherliness is a way of life. It enables a woman to express her total self with the tender feelings, protective attitudes, the encompassing love of the motherly women" (58). In Mohan Kumar's (CW) case, it is the absence of mother that decides the course of his life and destiny. In *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Jung writes that in the absence of a mother an individual ". . . unconsciously seeks his mother in every woman he meets" (19). This absence has far-reaching psychological consequences. Mohan Kumar's mother dies during childbirth. He undergoes a series of relationships before and after his marriage in search of a mother figure in each woman, "I never knew my mother's love for her son; I have heard that it is a very special love, more so if the son is also the first born" (CW85). In *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*, Freud discusses, "A child's first object is the mother's breast that nourishes it; love has its origin in attachment to the satisfied need for nourishment . . ." (188). 'Plasticity' or 'free

mobility' as Freud opines, manifest the very nature of the libidinal structure.

. . . we must bear in mind that the sexual instinctual impulses in particular are extraordinarily plastic, if I may so express it. One of them can take the place of another, one of them can take over another's intensity, if the satisfaction of another can afford complete compensation. They are related to one another like a network of intercommunicating channels filled with a liquid . . . Further, the component instincts of sexuality, as well as the sexual current which is compounded from them, exhibit a large capacity for changing their object, for taking another in its place- and one, therefore, that is more easily attainable (Standard Edition).

The other-women mother substitutes are accepted as part of that 'plasticity' or 'free mobility' of instinctual drives. The displacement of Mohan Kumar's mother by death has driven him to seek the solace of motherly love in the relationship with various women as he did not get it from his wife, Sonu.

Mohan Kumar finds the woman complex in Susanthika attractive. Jung in *Four Archetypes* states, "This rare combination of womanliness and masculine understanding proves valuable in the realm of intimate relationships as well as in practical matters" (99). He finds it easier to understand her when compared to the other women he had been associated with. The "excessively feminine woman terrifies men who have a mother-complex" (99) which was the case of Sarojini Bharadwaj. Sarojini's motherly instincts make her take up the role of mistress of the house after spending a night with Mohan Kumar, "What would you like for dinner? You don't have to suffer eating vegetarian stuff because of me" (CW 49). She is thwarted by Mohan Kumar to stick to her role of companion for which she had come. The woman inside of a man persistently bends towards accepting the influences exercised by the women outside. This however, needs a keen eye for detection as writers might observe restraints in serving it openly.

In his *Archetypes and Collective Unconscious*, Jung says: "husband is of secondary importance" (85). Janaki, from the short story, "*Wanted: A Son*," yearns for a male child but she and her husband Devi Lal fail as she gives birth to a girl child. All her prayers go in vain. Janaki's daughter-in-law, Baljit goes to the extent of getting impregnated by the caretaker of a *dargah* in order to give birth to a son. This instance boldly reduces a man's role in woman's life merely to procreation. A woman being desirous about begetting a male offspring also indicates her way of superseding the male dominance.

### **The Solipsistic Impulsions**

Solipsistic people are immersed in themselves and their actions prove that they are guided by self-love. An individual craves for self-satisfaction and psychology studies one's obsession with self. Khushwant Singh's leading concern is that 'self' and not the sexual mores of his generation. Self is the subject and sex is the means through which he reveals that self. His characters are self-centered, self-tied and prisoners of the self. Their predicament stems from their egoism which causes the fear of loss of their individuality and their refusal to give up their subjectivity.

In *The Company of Women*, Sonu, hailing from an affluent family, is instilled with values which she finds difficult to adhere to after her marriage with Mohan Kumar. Despite spending a substantial amount of time and having two children with him, she fails to understand her husband's emotional cravings or rather, never seen making sincere efforts in doing so. She abhors the idea of having her father-in-law in the same house though Mohan Kumar had built a new house which was spacious enough for the family. From Mohan's viewpoint, Sonu is a self-centered and arrogant woman, 'bitter woman, incapable of happiness and determined to make him unhappy' (CW6). He finds himself moving from one relationship to another, seeking the joys of the flesh, guided by innate sexual desires. He believes that divorce is better than loveless sex or no sex in married life. He feels 'empty inside and shrouded in loneliness' (CW 3). His associations with several women were distractions for him. He seeks pleasure of the 'self', prefers to immerse his self into oblivion away from moral jurisdictions, "They were not meant to be enduring; no strings attached. Great fun while they lasted" (CW7).

Max Lerner in *Character and Society* writes, "... the biological drives ... is the credo of the people in a hurry, striving for their quota of money, power, and "fun," snatching at what they can get while they run ... " (671). Short-term bodily pleasures impart a sense of adventure to Mohan Kumar and also to these women who seek escape from their otherwise depressing and uneventful lives. Khushwant Singh is a brilliant, intellectually conscious writer who does not arrogate to himself the privilege of prescribing remedies.

### Conclusion

Henry James in his *The Future of the Novel in Selected Criticism* writes, "All it needs (novel) is a subject and a painter. But for its subject, magnificently, it has the whole human consciousness" (220). When his contemporaries were conditioned by the taboos, Khushwant Singh talked about the elemental human passion in line with Philip Roth and John Updike. The men and women in Khushwant Singh's fictional world act and admit what many may do subtly or suggestively. Indulging in the pleasures of voyeurism and exhibitionism are the symptoms of deeper need for love and recognition in their lives, and in their search for love, they indulge in lust. Mohan Kumar from *Company of Women* serves as a classic example for such impulses. Instead of being in control of selection and direction, the women in Singh's narratives succumb to their physical desires and become objects of the male gaze, thus satisfying their own essential selves at the same time.

Singh's mother figures exhibit motherly instincts and their responses are conditioned by their social status as devout mothers. Yet an identifiable strain of expectations runs its course deep within. Sabhrai, in *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* is endowed with equal shares of strengths and weaknesses, where she is not immune to the desires of self for social security and superiority. Loss of a mother affects Mohan Kumar's psyche, the ambitious egotistical protagonist in *The Company of Women*. His search for the Anima in women through sexual acrobatics miserably fails, hence the lack of a sense of fulfillment affects him psychologically. Khushwant Singh's portrayal of characters who

enact sexual peculiarities with gay abandon, may compromise the writer's obligation as an upholder of morality but that too would militate against the integrity of a creative artist.

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## **Machiavellian Lumpenproletariat in Mano Majra: Analysis of the Peasantry Portrayed in Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*.**

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### *Abstract*

*The Indian writer, Khushwant Singh makes a valuable contribution to the literary discourse on Partition in India, with his authoritative knowledge of the Sikh community. His seminal work, Train to Pakistan, thereby portrays the ignorant role played by the Sikhs in remote villages during the period of Partition. The paper attempts to present a thorough Marxist analysis of the villagers in the fictional village of Mano Majra with the objective of understanding their composition and the factors that affect their perception of the contemporary political advancements. The paper argues that the peasantry in Mano Majra can be recognized as Lumpenproletariat, both in the Marxist and Fanonian senses of the word. In addition, the disquisition highlights how the Machiavellian concepts have been utilized by the administrators in order to manipulate the villagers and their perception.*

*Keywords: Frantz Fanon, Khushwant Singh, Lumpenproletariat, Machiavelli, Marxism, Train to Pakistan*

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Being a Sikh himself, Khushwant Singh has apparently taken the responsibility of projecting the issues faced by the Sikh community, which is a respected yet a minority community in India. His non-fiction writings, such as: *A History of the Sikhs* (1963) and *The Sikhs* (1953), have undoubtedly made Singh an authoritative figure in the representation of the Sikhs. His seminal novel, *Train to Pakistan* (1956), tends to capture the turmoil encountered by the Sikh community during the period of Partition in the state of Punjab, where both Muslims and Sikhs peacefully coexisted before the advent of independence. Taking into account the authority of Singh in representing the Sikhs and the fact that Singh himself has undergone the commotion caused by the partition, the said novel can be utilized for the accurate comprehension of some aspects of the Punjabi experience of the partition, which, according to Radhika Chopra, is "the single most traumatic experience in [the Indian] recent history" (164). Since Singh has kept the common masses in the focal point in the novel, the paper attempts to understand the sentiments and the transformation of the civilians in the fictional village of Mano Majra and the factors that affected their perception of the events taking place.

Mano Majra is the remote village, which is fictionally formulated as the locale of the novel, where "[t]here are only about seventy families, [. . .] Lala Ram Lal's is the only Hindu family. The others are Sikhs or Muslims, about equal in number" (Singh, 2). Even though

Singh has acknowledged the presence of some families of sweepers, their contribution to the development of the story remains ignorable.

When referring to the village and its dwellers, three facts deserve certain emphasis. The first is that the life in Mano Majra is regulated according to the time schedule of the trains that either stop or pass by the village's railway station, which "Mano Majra has always been known for" (Singh 3). In other words, the day in Mano Majra starts not with the cuckoo's call, but with the mail train's driver, who "invariably blows two long blasts on the whistle" (Singh 4). This has been an added advantage for the writer in highlighting the chaos which occurs later in the story. With the disruption of the schedule of the trains, the life in Mano Majra also gets disturbed. Secondly, the village is situated in Punjab, which is one of the states, or perhaps the second most traumatized state by the partition in India in 1947. On the other hand, the selection of a Punjabi village has facilitated the task of foregrounding the Sikh experience. The third fact, which also formulates the main concern of this paper is that the villagers in Mano Majra largely remain uninformed about the political transformation of the country that surrounds the village.

Validating the last fact stated above, the Sub inspector of the jurisdiction says that "no one in Mano Majra even knows that the British have left and the country is divided into Pakistan and Hindustan" (Singh 24). What the Sub inspector narrates about the villagers is reinforced by the villagers themselves several times. In the discussion that happens among Iqbal; the social worker, the lambardar, Meet Singh and a Muslim, the Muslim wishes Iqbal to inform them what happens outside their village. The Muslim asks: "[w]hat is happening in the world? What is all this about Pakistan and Hindustan?," to which the lambardar adds "we live in this little village and know nothing" (Singh 50 -51). It, thus, becomes understandable that the villagers in Mano Majra are placed in a form of political darkness, in which the working class does not get updated about the contemporary socio-political advancements. From a Marxist perspective, such uninformed peasantry can be recognized as the social class - that the Marxists call - Lumpenproletariat.

However, the definition of this particular term remains highly contested. Interpreting the notions promoted by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Peter Stallybrass writes a paper titled 'Marx and Heterogeneity: Thinking the Lumpenproletariat' (1990), where he mentions that "the term [ - Lumpenproletariat - ] had been used by Marx and Engels earlier to suggest a class immune to historical transformation" (70). As quoted by Stallybrass, Engels has stated that 'the lumpenproletariat is, generally speaking, a phenomenon that occurs in a more or less developed form in all the so far known phases of society' (70). In *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought* (2001), edited by Tom Bottomore, the said term is defined as "the 'refuse of all classes,' 'a disintegrated mass,' comprising 'ruined and adventurous off-shoots of the bourgeoisie, vagabonds, discharged soldiers [ . . . ] pickpockets, brothel keepers, [ . . . ] beggars etc'" (327). When generalizing the comments made by Stallybrass and Bottomore, it becomes comprehensible that a lumpenproletariat is an individual, who may arise from any societal stratum, yet is unable to remain conformed into the social norms of the stratum of origin, and therefore deviates from the class consciousness, making the particular individual 'immune' to class conflicts. As a

consequence, as the Marxists claim, the particular individual never becomes useful or reliable in the struggle towards social equality or communism. Writing an article titled 'Marx's Analysis of the French Class Structure' (1993), Peter Hayes brings out more specific characteristics of the lumpenproletariat as he states that "the lumpenproletariat and proletariat were similar in that neither owned property, this distinguished them from the bourgeoisie [...]" (102) (i).

Therefore, the Parallelism between the Marxist lumpenproletariat and the peasantry in Singh's *Mano Majra* is not only that they both belong to the working class but also the fact that they do not indulge in the class struggle or in upward social mobility. They may as well be entertaining 'false consciousness.' According to Ann B. Dobie, as explained in her book *Theory into Practice* (2002), "[w]hen such cultural conditioning leads the people to accept a system that is unfavorable for them without protest or questioning, that is, to accept it as the logical way for things to be, they have developed a false consciousness" (86). Similarly, the Sikh peasants gathered in the house of lambardar after the arrival of the 'ghostly train' claim that they are being punished by God for their previously committed sins:

'God is punishing us for our sins.'  
 'Yes, God is punishing us for our sins.'  
 'There is a lot of *zulum* in Pakistan.'  
 'That is because He wants to punish us for our sins.'  
 Bad acts yield a bitter harvest.' (129)

The peasants are much ideologically conditioned that they do not realize that the turmoil is a result of the arrogant political decisions made by certain political leaders, who were thirsty for power. Even though they have not committed any serious crimes to be punished in such a brutal manner, they accept their 'kismet'(destony). It was only a young villager who at least tried to question the fate, yet the speech was digressed as a result of the reference made to Iqbal, the 'problematic' social worker.

Further, Jugga, the badmash also accepts the dacoity as the absolute destiny in his life. According to Jugga, dacoity is something he has inherited. As the reader learns, both his father and his father's father were also reputed dacoits. Therefore, Jugga believes that he has also inherited and bound to continue dacoity. Passively accepting the treatment he receives (without any rationality in this particular scene) from police he tells Iqbal: "I am a badmash. All governments put me in jail. [. . .] it is our fate. It is written on our foreheads and on the lines of our hands" (65). Thus, from a marxist perspective, the villagers in *Mano Majra* has no intention of transcending the status, which they live in, and thereby they have no intention in challenging or at least questioning the authority. As a consequence, the abrupt efforts taken by the leftist Iqbal to inform the civilians about the capitalist exploitation that takes place throughout the country reduce to futile attempts.

The interesting aspect is that the employability of the concept of lumpenproletariat in deciphering the novel transcends the Marxist dimension. The post-colonial critic,

psychiatrist and philosopher, Frantz Fanon has also used the term lumpenproletariat to refer to the masses, who are not aware of the political progressions. Since Fanon borrows the term from Marxism, Fanon's definition of the term also remains problematic. However, it must be clarified that Fanonian sense of the term considerably deviates from that of the Marxist.

According to Harold H. Fairchild, the author of the paper titled 'Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* in Contemporary Perspective,' as Fanon's concentration rests with the process of decolonization, "He sees struggle as emanating from the peasant, the lumpenproletariat. [. . .]" (193). In his book, *The Wretched of the Earth* (2004), Fanon identifies these peasants (or lumpenproletariat) as "those who still have not found a single bone to gnaw in the colonial system" (81). These remarks bring out two key characteristics of the Fanonian concept of lumpenproletariat: First, the lumpenproletariat is not accustomed to the main stream process of thinking, which is 'colonialist' in Fanon's context and on the other hand 'nationalist and separatist' in the context of the novel. Secondly, it reiterates the fact that lumpenproletariat is capable of generating the struggle against oppression and exploitation by themselves without any external intervention.

In the context of the partition in 1947, the dominant ideology that prevailed in most of the parts in the British Raj was greatly influenced by the separatist nationalism, which is fueled by religious differences. While the believers of Islam advocated the creation of a separate Muslim country--Pakistan, the other Indian communities (including mainly the Hindus and the Sikhs) were in favor of an India. These **believes** led to ethnic violence and brutality throughout India. Most of the civilians were carried away with these main stream thoughts, without understanding the undercurrent political implications of the partition. According to Chopra: "[b]efore the people could realize the political and social implications of the partition, they were swept off their feet by a wave of violence that swiftly became a tide" (165-166).

From a Fanonian perspective, the villagers in Mano Majra are lumpenproletariats as they are not conformed into this dominant ideology of the separatist nationalism. Being a 'remote' village, the people could maintain a healthy distance from the violence caused by the said ideology. As a consequence, amidst extremist violence, Mano Majra remained a tranquil village, where both Hindus and Muslims peacefully coexisted. Being exposed to the sentiments of religious rivalry, Iqbal questions Meet Singh about the existence of different religions in the village, to which Meet Singh answers: "[e]veryone is welcome to his religion. Here next door is a Muslim mosque. When I pray to my Guru, Uncle Imam Baksh calls to Allah" (Singh 39). Another example that highlights the mutual respect existent in the village is the manner in which the different communities greet each other. When the Muslims are greeted by the Sikhs with 'salaam', it is reciprocated with a 'Sat Sri Akal.'

Even the *badmash* Jugga, who was kept in jail during the period of chaotic occurrences, questions why the Muslim villagers had to leave the village. Since he was not updated about the current tragedies at Mano Majra, he finds it difficult to understand the

necessity of evacuation of the Muslims. Jugga still perceives the village with reference to his experiences prior to his apprehension. The only instance where some contempt against the Muslim community arises from within the Sikh villagers is in the scene where the Sikh peasants are at the lambardar's, where the Sikh youth becomes impatient about the treatment that the Sikh community in general receives from the Muslims in Pakistan. Referring to the Muslims, a youth asks "what are we to do with all these pigs we have with us? They have been eating our salt for generations and see what they have done! We have treated them like our own brothers. They behaved like snakes" (Singh 130). These sentiments were invigorated only after the far away violence is brought to their own door steps with the arrival of the train full of dead corpses. But still, this reference is deemed to be something that the villagers cannot relate to as the situation has been much peaceful in their village. Consequently, the dichotomy between 'the Sikh' and 'the Muslim' immediately shifts into the binary opposition of 'the outsider' and 'the insider' as the Sikhs at Mano Majra attempt to alienate themselves from the Sikh refugees and to be one with the Mano Majra Muslims. When reference is made to the possible threat of the Sikh refugees, "[t]he youth who had referred to Muslims as pigs spoke haughtily: 'We would like to see somebody raise his little finger against our tenants while we live!'" (131). It becomes, thereby, evident that the Mano Majra Sikhs do not succumb to the violent mainstream ideology, though the impulsive sentiments of anger emanate as they just experienced a brutal attack on their community.

When considering Mano Majra villagers as lumpenproletariat, it is essential to understand what factors that have made them so. As the author of the novel mentions the first factor would be the remoteness of the village. Secondly, as the Marxists tend to pin point and as elaborated earlier in the paper, the peasants are affected by the religious beliefs as they believe in karma and penance. Third factor would be the fact that the villagers are not educated enough even to read a newspaper. This is the very reason for Iqbal to receive excessive honour and respect from the villagers of all the ethnic communities. The fact that by 10:30 in the morning "[c]hildren are out grazing the cattle by the river" (Singh 05) implies that even the younger generation is not exposed to the institutionalised education. All these factors refrain the peasantry from interacting with the subtle means of transfusing the dominant ideology. What is more vividly explained by Singh is the intervention of the government and its representatives in determining what the villages should or should not know.

When a ghostly train arrives at the Mano Majra station, which is like a significant national monument for the simple village, and when it disrupts the entire life style of the villagers, the peasants are kept in the complete obscurity. The authority sends a policeman to inform the lambardar that they are in need of "all the wood there in [the village] and all the kerosene oil [the villagers] can spare" (86), but the reason for the requirement is again kept as a secret from the villagers. Similarly, Mr. Hukum Chand, the magistrate and the deputy commissioner of the district entertains the privilege of manipulating the reality of the peasantry. For instance, he—along with the sub inspector—has the authority to alter the identity of Iqbal, who was converted from 'Iqbal, the unknown' to 'Mohammed Iqbal' and then to 'Iqbal Singh.' In the same manner, the murderer of the Lala Ram Lal is also changed

according to the political situation, but not according to the available evidence. The responsibility of the crime, hence, shifted from Jugga to Malli and then to Sultana, who is a Muslim.

Yet, the obscurity and the manipulation of the reality are not intended to harm the villagers. In fact, such arrangements were made to minimize the possible adverse outcomes that may be caused as a consequence of impulsive mob mentality. The peasants were never directly informed about the content of the first ghostly train. It can be assumed that the revelation of the truth could have caused turmoil in then peaceful village of Mano Majra. And to prevent such a disaster, the best possible decision that the government could make was not to inform the crowd. On the other hand, the reader realizes that towards the latter part of the story, the evacuation of the Muslims from Mano Majra was the only option left in order to secure the lives of the Muslim villagers. Growing mob mentality of the Sikhs, increasing number of disturbed Sikh refugees, the presence of opportunistic dacoits like Malli and the absence of the authoritative and potential savior, Jugga have all started alerting the authority of the impending tragedy of the Muslims in Mano Majra. Hukum Chand's manipulation of the reality is carried out with the intention of tarnishing the good relationship of the Sikhs and the Muslims in the village, so that the villagers would accept the evacuation of the Muslim populace from the village as the sole option left. As the author says: "[Hukum Chand's] immediate problem was to save Muslim lives. He would do that in any way he could" (105).

This notion of altering the reality, or in other words—deception—for the greater good is a prominent idea advocated by the Italian thinker, Niccolò Machiavelli, who writes in his book, *The Prince* (2011), that “experiences has shown [. . .] that those [administrators] who have not pinned themselves up to that punctuality and preciseness have done great things” (78). Machiavelli, further, promotes the idea of a prince being as prudent as a fox. According to Machiavelli an administrator, “who is wise and prudent, cannot or ought not to keep his parole” (79). In this manner Machiavelli, the father of modern political science, has promoted the concept that it is always not necessary for the administrators to project the truth to the general public, if the manipulated projection can better serve the community. The reading of the novel would also exemplify that the actions taken by Hukum Chand did never lead to further complications in the Mano Majra community, even though the innocent is temporally punished and the actual culprits are released under surveillance.

Irrespective of all these strategic Machiavellian efforts implemented by the magistrate, Hukum Chand, towards the end of the novel the so called lumpenproletariat in Mano Majra becomes revolutionary. Some of the Sikh men from the village decide to massacre thousands of Muslims who are about to flee India. The decision remains stern even after they acknowledged the presence of the Mano Majra Muslims in the train, which is to be attacked. The very Mullah, whom they referred to as 'uncle,' the men and women whom they considered as their own 'brothers' and 'sisters' are to be attacked by the Mano Majra Sikhs with the assistance of the Sikh refugees, whom they initially considered as the outsiders. This abrupt transformation—at first glance—signifies the validity of Fanon's second claim (referred to earlier in the essay), where he suggests that the revolution against

the oppressor would emanate from the lumpenproletariat, itself. (Here, it should be emphasized that the immediate threat, that the Sikh peasantry experiences, comes from the Muslim community, who thereby becomes the oppressor in this context).

Yet, it must be mentioned that Fanon has been highly criticized for believing that the lumpenproletariat or the peasantry has the ability to cause a revolution entirely by themselves, without the assistance of any other party. Questioning the mentioned claim by Fanon, Nguyen Nghe emphasizes the importance of 'urban militant' in provoking the 'revolutionary consciousness' of the peasantry. As paraphrased by L. Adele Jinadu in his article named 'Aspects of the Political Philosophy of Frantz Fanon' (1973), Nghe says:

The peasant cannot develop a revolutionary consciousness, and that it is up to the urban militant to expose the peasants to their sorry plight. [...] [I]t is essential to recognize the need for political leadership by the urban militant, without whose leadership the peasant revolution will become a Jacquerie without a future" (275).

Similarly in Singh's novel, the 'revolutionary consciousness' of the peasantry is evoked by an urban militant (who is both a militant and a mercenary), who abruptly arrives at Mano Majra to intimidate the Sikhs for being impotent. According to him, the impotency is measured by the willingness or unwillingness to be involved in the violence against the Muslims in India. However, the Sikhs being a community concerned about the heroism and manliness would obviously be intimidated by this connection made by an apparently better educated and a military figure. Inculcating the idea of retaliation in the mind of both the villagers and the refugees in the village, the militant urges them to ambush the Muslims:

For each Hindu or Sikh they kill, kill two Mussulmans. For each woman they abduct or rape, abduct two. For each home they loot, loot two. For each trainload of dead they send over, send two across. For each road convoy that is attacked, attack two. That will stop the killing on the other side. It will teach them that we also play this game of killing and looting (Singh 157).

It is these provocative speeches made by the young military officer that causes the transformation of the Mano Majra Sikhs from peace loving brotherly peasants into a group of blood thirsty barbarians.

Having scrutinized the portrayal of the peasants or the villagers in Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, it becomes evident that they belong to the stratum of lumpenproletariat in both Marxist and Fanonian senses of the word. They become Marxist lumpenproletariat as they believe in the inherited living conditions as the destiny that can never be altered and also because they are not aware of the politics happening in the national level arena. And by extent they can also get recognized as lumpenproletariat from a Fanonian perspective, given that they do not succumb to the violent dominant nationalist ideology, which promotes nothing but barbaric violence. Among several reasons which facilitate the task of maintaining the said community as ill-informed peasantry, the most

manipulated factor is how the authority alters the reality before it reaches to the common masses. Yet, when examined through Machiavellian lenses, the efforts of the magistrate become a more practical and perhaps a more humane approach to the existing political crisis. However, the intervention of an urban militant could challenge and overpower all the efforts taken by the magistrate, Meet Singh and the lambardar. At the success of provocation, the village Sikhs were determined to slaughter their own Muslim companions. Even though it has not been a matter under consideration in this paper, it should also be stated, before concluding, that the Muslims were rescued in a suicidal mission by another Sikh.

#### Notes

- i) Heyes goes on to identify a significant similarity between the 'Lumpenproletariat' and the 'finance aristocracy'...neither were involved in the productive process"102. This author has decided not to mention that fact as the means of production seems irrelevant to the analysis of the novel which takes place in a context rather contradictory to the western society.
- ii) He refers to a 'prince' to be exact.

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## Triumph of Humanity: A Comparative Reading of Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* and Samaresh Basu's "Adaab"

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### Abstract

A sizable number of literary works portraying man's inhumanity to man during the most momentous period of the history of Indian sub-continent have been written against the backdrop of the Partition of British India and communal violence during 1940s. It would be interesting to explore the glorification of those rare characters whose human values remain intact despite the prevailing brutality of communal violence. The present paper mainly focuses on the two narratives, *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh and "Adaab," a short story by Samaresh Basu, both set against the background of communal violence during the Partition of India in 1947, to demonstrate how amidst the naked dance of death and destruction some of the characters transcend the communal hatred and display human values, thereby asserting the triumph of love, affection and goodness over the communal hatred that spelled human disaster on a great scale.

**Keywords:** Communal Identity, Humanity, Violence, Partition, Riots.

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Partition of British India in 1947 has been a fertile subject for the creative writers in English, Bangla and Panjabi languages. It brought in its train massive destruction of life and property and unleashed the devil in man as men clutched at one another's throat like beasts. Millions of people were uprooted from their homes and hearths, women dishonoured and paraded naked in the streets and roads and trains loaded with dead bodies of Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus triggered off the worst communal riots. As cited in "Partition Stories" in the Shodhganga "Paradoxically, even as the bells of freedom pealed, they sounded a death-knell to man" (90). In the words of Swarna Aiyar: "The exhilaration and excitement heralding independence in some areas of the sub-continent were, however, surpassed in intensity by the exceptionally savage massacres that gripped other areas." The division of the country into India and Pakistan in 1947 not only led to the massive displacement of people across the new borders but also witnessed the worst frenzy of Hindu-Muslim riots resulting in the massacre of half a million people. Some important works are *An Unwritten Epic* by M.U. Memon, "Toba Tek Singh" by S.H. Manto, "Lajwanti" by R.S. Bedi, Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar*, Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas* and Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*. These works portray the shock, violence, loss of human dignity, and the play of bestial instincts as resulted from the partition of the country and consequent communal disturbances. These creative writings of the period portrayed not only the hostility among different ethnic communities but also depicted the inhuman attitude of the family and relatives towards the traumatised victims

of the violence. Thus, the woman protagonists of the two narratives – “*Lajwanti*” by RS Bedi and *Pinjar* by Amrita Pritam – face humiliation and insensitivity from their respective families. Focusing on the fatality of the partition and its aftermath, Surbhi Jain (2016) quotes Amrita Pritam: “The most terrible happening of the time was Partition. I still shiver when I think of those blood-drenched days . . . It was thus that Puro of *Pinjar* took shape and the novel wrote itself.”

When the monster of violence operates the brutal instincts trigger off. In a period of communal disturbances, the picture is much more dangerous. People easily make their fellow human beings a victim of their brutishness. The only identity considered in a state of communal disturbances is the religious identity. According to Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen, religious identity takes precedence over all other identities during the time of riots which unleashes violence and suffering on the poor irrespective of their religious identities. Recounting the deadly 1940s Hindu-Muslim riots in Bengal, which he witnessed as 11 years old, Sen observes:

“In the Hindu-Muslim riots, Hindu thugs killed poor Muslims underdogs with ease, while Muslim thugs assassinated impoverished Hindu victims with abundance. Even though the community identities of the two groups of brutalised prey were quite different, their class identities (as poor labourers with little economic means) were much the same. But no identity other than religious ethnicity was allowed to count in those days of polarized vision focused on singular categorization” (170).

A large body of critical writings dealing with the Partition of 1947, mainly focuses on the brutality and savagery of human beings during the period of ethnic violence. How the trauma of communal disturbances swipes off all the civility, decency, morality, and human values from the human mind is the basic concern for most of the scholars. Navdip Kaur focused on the rapidity and the devastating nature of ethnic hostility: “In only three months, between August and October 1947, the land of five rivers, was engulfed in a civil war . . . This was a time when the hurricane of communal passions swept the whole Punjab community clan of all decency, morality and sense of human values.” Imrul Kayes Alam Sarkar comments on Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, “The brutal story of political hatred and turbulent communal violence become a predominant theme in this novel . . . The result of the partition is reflected through the people of Mano Majra and Mano Majra allegorically becomes a microcosm that represents the whole scenario of India or Pakistan.” The communal trauma and violence during partition were emphasized in the research work of Rajesh Kumar where he made a comparative study of Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* and Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* against the backdrop of the communal frenzy during the partition. For him, both “*Train to Pakistan* and *A Bend in the Ganges* affirm the background of the horrid communal riots.” While analysing the short story “*The Riot*” by Khushwant Singh, Seema Rani focused on the psychological imbalance resulting from the trauma of communal violence: “In “*The Riot*,” Khushwant Singh has proved how little psychological imbalance can create havoc, how a rumour, a suspicious mind, sick psychology can affect people, society and the nation . . . The people who were neighbours

and close friends, living together for decades, have immediately grown suspicious of one another" (45). Dr. Muhammad Iqbal Chawla emphasized the fatality of the ethnic hatred in Northern India, especially in Punjab, during the partition: "... Punjab especially became a bloody battleground that left a permanent legacy of hatred between the successor states, India and Pakistan."

These fictional works draw a vivid picture of the communal violence which caused bloody turbulence on both sides of the Wagah border. One less explored factor amidst all the horrible happenings during the partition is the innate goodness of human beings which is the only silver lining in the murkiness that enveloped social interaction among the people across the communal divide. The present paper focuses on some of the social niceties people across the communal divide observed to put the other in comfort zones by greeting in a manner they are instinctively familiar with, as a non-Muslim greeting a Muslim neighbour by saying 'Adaab' a non-Muslim staking his life to save the life of some Muslim fellows. Such courtesies happening amidst the prevailing climate of confusion, mistrust, trauma, crisis and violence speak volumes for the basic human goodness. By and large the characters in the selected narratives build up the bond of fraternity and fellow-feeling. *Train to Pakistan* and the short story, *Adaab* convey the fundamental truth that in spite of the forces of revenge and communal hatred at the time of the Partition of India, people uphold humanity and nurture it at the gravest risk to their lives and limbs.

*Train to Pakistan* portrays how Mano Majra, once a peaceful village inhabited by several religious communities turns into a battleground when the train, loaded with a thousand of Sikh dead bodies from Pakistan, arrives in the village. The traumatized Sikh villagers think of killing two of their Muslim neighbours for each Sikh killed in Pakistan. Some of the characters as Meet Singh and Juggut Singh keep their cool and plead for sanity in the bedlam of mass killings. Meet Singh protests against the revengeful thinking of the Sikh villagers while Juggut Singh takes the ultimate step of sacrificing his life to save the lives of several Muslim villagers. The short story, "*Adaab*" by Samaresh Basu is based on the riots in Bengal in 1946. The author spins the yarn about two individuals, one from the Hindu and the other from the Muslim community. As the narrative unfolds, the tension caused by violence and the impending disaster make them forget their communal identity. They feel concerned for the safety of each other. They become the representatives of all the anxiety-ridden victims of communal violence who are unsure of their safety, lives, homes and families.

In *Train to Pakistan*, Khushwant Singh blended sordid realities with humanism as he believed that the evil of the human mind can be controlled and demolished by love and human concern. The narrative starts with a peaceful description of the village Mano Majra on the bank of Sutlej in Punjab, before the summer of 1947. People of different communities live in perfect harmony as if they are close relatives. The Sikh villagers treat their Muslim tenants with love and affection, and the Muslims take the Sikhs for their near and dear ones. The village mosque and the Sikh temple stand side by side. The people live in blissful ignorance completely unaware of what is happening outside Mano Majra. But in the summer of 1947, everything gets changed. When the train, loaded with thousands of dead

bodies of the Sikh from Pakistan, arrives Mano Majra, the whole village turns into a battleground. As the novelist points out: "The arrival of the ghost train in broad daylight created a commotion in Mano Majra" (82). But initially, the communal frenzy does not enter into the minds of the people of Mano Majra. The *lambardar* assures Imam Baksh: "Yes, you are our brothers. As far as we are concerned, you and your children and your grandchildren can live here as long as you like. If anyone speaks rudely to you, your wives or your children, it will be us first and our wives and children before a single hair of your heads is touched" (134). The Sikh and Muslim villagers fall into each other's arms and weep like children. But human psychology is unpredictable and religious sentiments take hold of human minds. One can easily lure somebody by exploiting his/her religious sentiment. This is what happens in Mano Majra as some extremist Sikh communal leaders exploit the religious sentiments of the Sikhs. Thus provoked, the Sikh villagers begin to say: "Never trust a Mussulman" (128). On the other hand, for the Muslims, "For the first time, the name Pakistan came to mean something to them—a refuge where there are no Sikhs." The Sikhs vent their anger, "We have treated them as our brothers. They have behaved like snakes" (130). Thus, the air of communal hatred fills the peaceful atmosphere of Mano Majra.

Amidst the communal turmoil, the sanity and humanity of some villagers does not get drowned in the cacophony produced by hot headed elements. Meet Singh, the priest of the Sikh temple is the one who protests against the illogical spirit of revenge that had seized the minds of his community: "what have the Muslims here done to us for us to kill them in revenge for what Muslims in Pakistan are doing. Only people who have committed crimes should be punished" (157). But the frenzied villagers brush aside his protestations. They reply, "It is enough for me to know that they are Muslims" (159). So, according to the Sikhs, the Muslims of Mano Majra have to pay the price of being Muslim, have to pay for what the people of their community in Pakistan has done to the Sikhs. Thus, the Sikhs try to justify their hatred for their next-door neighbours whom once in the recent past, they used to call as their brother or sister or uncle or mother. On the other side, the mysterious character Iqbal whose communal identity is not known, is kept under wraps. To be sure of his ambiguous communal identity, the sub-inspector examines his naked body and tries to find out if the foreskin of his male organ is removed. Towards the end of the novel, Iqbal thinks that it would be better to leave such a place where "he had to prove his Sikhism to save his life" (172). Mano Majra remains witness to such shameful pathetic events. The Sikhs become hostile towards their fellow villagers. Meet Singh fails to pacify them. Iqbal, who once claimed that he has come to restore peace in the village, now thinks "In a state of chaos, self-preservation is the supreme duty" (178). But Juggut Singh, once a village gangster, known as 'Jugga badmash,' now changes to a sensible man under the charm and love of Nooran, a Muslim weaver's daughter. Being aware of the plan of the Sikh villagers to slaughter all the Muslims who are going to Pakistan by train, Juggut determines to take the ultimate step. He takes the risk of his own life to save thousands of Muslim lives. In the end, he succeeds in his attempt but fails to keep his life, a rare instance of love and humanity winning against all odds. Vasant Shahane rightly observed, "*Train to Pakistan* is not merely realistic track nor is it a bare record of actual events. On the contrary, it is a recreation of the real and it reaffirms the novelist's faith in man and renews artistically his avowed allegiance to the humanistic ideal" (76).

In August 1946, during the last phase of British rule in India, Bengal faced the frenzy of communal violence. On 16<sup>th</sup> August, Muslim League announced the Direct Action Day to show the strength of Muslim feelings towards the demand for an autonomous and sovereign Pakistan. This action resulted in the worst kind of communal riots that British India had ever seen. On the evening of that day at 6 pm curfew was imposed in the parts of the city where there had been rioting. Samaresh Basu's short story "*Adaab*" captures this particular point of time as the curfew is clamped in various parts of the city. The story begins with the description of the night, "*Ratrir nishtabdhata ke kapiye diye Military toholdar garita Victoria Park er pas diye ekta pak kheye gelo...choturdi ke choriye poreche gupto ghatoker dol – choragopta hanche ondhokar ke ashroy kore*" (breaking the silence of the night the car of the military force passes by the side of the Victoria park . . . . The assassins run to and fro, and taking their chance of darkness and silence they capture their victims . . . ) (Basu 75). The narrative introduces the two individuals who appear to be taking shelter behind a half-destroyed dustbin. The vision of their fixed eyes bears the sign of fear, mistrust, and anxiety. They cannot trust each other, each one anticipates an attack from the other one. Nothing happens yet none of them dares to inquire about the identity of the other. They fear that once the communal identity gets exposed some unthinkable horror may happen to their lives, , they prefer to be silent about their communal identity. Mistrust and anxiety grip their minds. Keeping aside their communal identities, they converse and it becomes clear that both belong to the labour class. The Muslim is a boatman, and the Hindu a mill-worker. The mill-worker seems to be a politically conscious man. Based on the information from news bulletins he comments that the Muslim League leaders are responsible for the riots. "There is satire in the mill-worker's words on the politicians who never think about the common people. He says: "We die and our children go begging and that is all we gain . . . the leaders are comfortable in their fine seventh-floor flat" (Parveen 22). Provocative speeches of the high ranking leaders trigger the riots and the worst sufferers are the common people. The boatman agrees with the mill-worker's comments that these types of riots can fetch nothing except destruction for both the communities. And the boatman wails over the loss of humanity: "Manush na amra jyan kuttar bachcha hoiya gechi" (We are not human beings, we become the sons of dog) (Basu78). The statement of the boatman makes the mill-worker recollect his traumatised past when in the previous year riots, he lost his brother-in-law. From that time onward, he has to bear the responsibilities of his sister's family. The feeling of anxiety thinking of the loss of family members engulfs their minds. At a point in their conversation, their communal identity gets exposed. None of them causes any harm to the other. Rather, the trouble, violence, and anxiety make both of them victims, thus arouse in them a sense of fellow-feeling. Now both become tensed thinking of the British police force. The boatman comments of the British police force: "Dhyamon go biswas nai" (Those bastards cannot be trusted) (Basu 79).. Before saying goodbye to the mill-worker, the boatman greets him saying *Adaab* which is a wish to mean "I offer my respect to you." The greeting shows that their human values remain intact even amid anxiety and horror. The boatman wishes to meet the mill-worker, "...if fate permits, we will meet again . . ." (Basu 80). At the end of the short story the boatman gets shot by the British police force and fails to join his family to celebrate Eid. The mill-worker feels terribly for the boatman, his eyes well

up with tears for the family of the boatman. Evoking the sufferings of the innocent, the story articulates a common theme underlying the experiences of people in similar circumstances where religion or community emblems hardly matter.

In *Train to Pakistan*, the village gangster Jugga crosses the boundary of communal divide and falls in love with a Muslim weaver's daughter, Nooran. Towards the end of the novel he sacrifices his life to protect his love as well as to save the lives of thousands of Muslim villagers. C.L. Khatri aptly observes: "The ultimate optimism of the novelist is shown in the end that shows the victory of virtue and love over vice and hatred even in this utter chaos" (100). In the short story "*Adaab*," the boatman and the mill-worker, keeping aside their communal identities, forge a bond of brotherhood. Thus, the characters of the two narratives prove once again that no boundaries, be it religious or communal or political, cannot eclipse the intrinsic goodness and humanness of man and eventually human values triumph in spite of the hostility and hatred that reign supreme in a communally charged times as the partition of the Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan in 1947.

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## Revisiting Ezekiel's *The Night of the Scorpion*: A Freudian Reading

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### *Abstract*

*Poetry has always delighted readers. More so, if the poem throws up new meanings from time to time.. The more meanings in a poem, merrier would be the reading of it. This is precisely what is attempted in this paper. A simple poem that narrates the sordid tale of a mother bitten by a scorpion, as recollected by the son, much later in his life, presents myriad ideas about the mother, father, the congregating villagers and the young boy watching the episode unfold in front of his eyes. The emotions experienced as a young boy haunts the speaker thorough his growing up years before he decided to give vent to them. His subtle description of the event as he saw and remembered suggests that the emotional pain endured by him far out lives his mother's physical pain both in terms of intensity and duration- a point that cannot be missed in the poem. This paper is an attempt to read the psychology of the boy's mind in Freudian terms and thought.*

*Keywords: Freud, id, ego, super ego, Oedipus complex, haunt, mother, father*

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### **Introduction**

Nissim Ezekiel, an Indian Jewish poet, actor, playwright, editor and art critic is considered to be a foundational figure in the literary history of Postcolonial India. Renowned specifically for Indian Poetry in English, he has captured the essence of life as he experienced it, in his poems. In the poem, *The Night of the Scorpion* the poet depicts the picture of a typical village scene where a mother is stung by a scorpion and the entire neighbourhood converges to share the pain with her. The poem encapsulates their offer of consolations, explanations, prayers, suggestions and recommendations, attempts at healing and many more. The poet persona recalls the night when his mother is bitten by a scorpion. The sequence of events that arise until the following evening when the pain disappears are narrated as seen and remembered by the poet persona. Such a recollection calls for greater inquiry into the poem rather than looking at the village atmosphere and the attitude of the villagers which seem to be the general response by the readers over the years. This paper aims at focussing on the recollections and its implications in the interpretation and understanding of the poem.

The analysis proceeds along the following lines. Freud's theory of Psychoanalysis is discussed in detail. The main tenets of the theory as enunciated by Freud are imploded in a way that facilitates using the theory to interpret literary discourses. A brief outline of the poem is necessary to understand the sequence of events. Emphasis on the structure of the syntax also deem necessary to comprehend the relationship between the characters The poem is then analysed with reference to Freud's theory of Oedipus Complex to unravel the



relationship between the young poet persona, the mother and the father. The theory and its main tenets for analysing the poem, is also briefly discussed.

### **Freud's theory at a glance**

As a branch of epistemology, Psychoanalytic theory examines the different dimensions of the human psyche. The psyche is understood to be the immaterial part of a person as it is not a physical or biological component of the Person. It is essentially a social and cultural construct. However, it remains as an indispensable part of the person from birth to death. Extensive references have been made to Sigmund Freud's Translated Compendium by James Strachey et al *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* and Salman Akthar's *Dictionary of Psychoanalyses*.

According to Freud, every human being has a natural tendency to relax and shun hard labour. This stems from the fact that human needs when inside the womb are taken care of completely, eliminating any necessity to work. Conversely, shortly after birth, the child encounters a moment of realisation when its desire of the same state of passivity no longer helps in its growth. This moment of realisation causes a rift or a conflict between the two states of the psyche. The first is the desire or the 'pleasure principle' which gets into conflict with the need to work or move for its existence, the 'reality principle'. The pleasure principle ensures that the child remains firmly bound to the mother's body while the reality principle suppresses this desire. The reality principle ensures, the child conforms to societal rules and regulations. In the case of boys, the conformation is to the rules and regulations of the father as Freud believes that the male child is born with an instinctive desire for the mother. Similarly girls are born with a desire for the father, yet have to conform to the rules and regulations of the mother. This is the point at which the human psyche begins by suppressing the pleasure principles.

Freud designates three components for the psyche, viz, the Id, the superego and the Ego. The Id refers to the subconscious wherein all the suppressed feelings, chaotic thoughts and experiences are accommodated. Freud further claims that the child's suppressed desire for the parent of the opposite sex resides in the subconscious. The intensity of the male child's suppression determines not only the intensity of desire for the mother but, the intensity of fear caused by the intimidating presence of the father. The child further imagines that the father is its competitor with respect to its relationship with the mother. This makes the child dislike the father and the father's attitude/ mannerisms etc. However, the child is also cautious in its approach to the father, as it believes any animosity with the father could deprive of the affections of the mother. Hence it maintains a safe distance with the father. This could also lead the child to detach form the mother, fearing the wrath of the father. This negotiation between the child's desires and fear is essentially the negotiation of *id* and superego. Freud promulgated the term Oedipal complex, or Oedipus complex, to describe a child's feelings of desire, jealousy and anger toward his same-sex parent.

As the opposite extreme of *id*, *superego* refers to the force used by the father to drive the child's desires into the *id*. Social Institutions, traditions, family values etc. too contribute to this. The direct repercussion of this continuous negotiation between the *id* and the

*superego* is seen the emergence of the *ego* of the self. The *superego* is not a fixed entity. Therefore it is very difficult to define it. It is nonetheless seen as a byproduct of the subconscious *id*, including its structured and unstructured desires and the *superego* with its inherent patriarchal repressions. The strength of the ego is decided by the strength to weakness ratio of *id* and *superego*. Consequently, on analyzing the ego of a person, one has to delve deep into their subconscious to identify the strength and weakness of *id* and *superego*. This is downright impossible. What Freud suggests is to study the manifest symbols and images as revealed in the form of dreams. In a literary text, the language used can also suggest and assist the study in addition to symbols and images.

### The poem in a nutshell

"*Night of the Scorpion*" is a short narrative poem, that at the very outset, suggests reflection of the speaker on "the night his mother was stung by a scorpion". It was believed to be hiding beneath a bag of rice to avoid the rain. The speaker specifically remembers the way the mother is bitten with a 'flash of diabolic tail, at once implying that the scorpion is evil and demonic, spreading the poison in a flash. The scorpion seems to be an unfortunate victim in this drama, as it does only that which is natural in an attempt to protect itself. However, it is at once deemed demonic. It risks the rain again and therefore vanishes from the scene. The entire village congregates in the house much to the dislike of the speaker. Their arrival is as disgusting as a swarm of flies. However, the religious minded villagers started to "buzz the name of God" to paralyse the scorpion. The claim that if the scorpion moved, the poison also moved in the blood of the mother, propelled them to invoke the Almighty. Further, they attempted to explain the causes for the present predicament of the mother, citing Scriptures, superstitions, belief, foretelling future as the speaker – then very young, watched innocently and helplessly. Amidst all these commotion, the scorpion remained elusive. Nevertheless, the lanterns the villagers carried threw "giant scorpion shadows" on the sun baked wall, which perhaps reflects the dimensions of the fear. Their words of consolation notwithstanding, the mother, seated at the centre, groaned endlessly, while the pain remained unabated, Then came the father, "sceptic, rationalist" as the speaker observes. He tried using "powder, mixture, herbs, hybrid" to save the mother. He even poured a "little paraffin" on the toe bitten by the scorpion and lit it with a matchstick. This may sound rational, but can be calibrated with the villagers' expressing a similar sentiment in "May the sins of your previous birth be burned away tonight." What the innocent villagers consider a sin is perhaps what the father calls as poison. The speaker stunned to silence watches "the flame feeding on the mother" though it is only a point in the toe that is set to fire. The holy man chants a few verses to nullify the poison. However, none seemed to work until twenty hours after which the pain disappeared on its own. The mother thanks the Lord that the scorpion "picked on her and spared her children" of the painful ordeal. This is generally seen as a sign of the mother's care concern and love for her children so dominant in the Indian cultural settings.

### Analyses of the poem in the light of Freud's theory

Freud's theory postulates three crucial pointers to identify Oedipus complex. He theorized that some people may develop psychological fixation owing to one or more of the following:

1. A lack of proper gratification during one of the psychosexual stages of development.
2. Receiving a strong impression from one of these stages, in which case the person's personality would reflect that stage throughout adult life. (Freud, *Sexuality*, 167)
3. "An excessively strong manifestation of these instincts at a very early age [which] leads to a kind of partial *fixation*, which then constitutes a weak point in the structure of the sexual function". (Freud, *Five Lectures*, 73.)

In the poem, we can notice that these tendencies manifest in the following ways.

1. Suppressed desires, especially for the mother leading to mother fixation
2. Dislike for the father
3. Fear of the father

On analyzing the poem on these lines, it is clear and evident that a Freudian interpretation could explain several as yet unclear aspects of the poem. The poem is essentially a recapitulation of the observations by the speaker, in first person, perhaps as a child- a daughter or son. Names and ages are not disclosed, Therefore, it might sound as a strange conjecture to decide that the child - witness is a young boy. Needless to say, the observations are keen, precise, and exact to the minutest detail. Perhaps, the poet persona, is also endowed with high quality expressive skills which can be seen in the build up of layers of tension as the drama unfolds. The stone like objectivity in the words of consolation and explanation by the peasants that help alleviate pain; the descriptions of the search and the actions of the neighbors to kill the scorpion; the hurried, and the rather impatient reaction of the "skeptical rational" father: the paradox of the various superstitions and the 'scientific' methods; the religious instantaneous remedy through herbs, hybrid and mixture; the battle of evil versus good culminating in the anticlimax of the pain vanishing after twenty hours, are all reflections of the speaker's attitude of repulsion towards each of them. While, the mother is presented more as a victim of the scorpion bite, the accusations of the villagers who suggest past sins as the reason for her present predicament, and the father's unsympathetic approach towards healing the pain. This clearly indicates a certain mother fixation, generally attributed to the male child.

The speaker could therefore, be a young boy, if one reads the poem through the Freudian lens. At the very outset, the child is able to 'remember' the night a scorpion bit its mother. Not just this but the sequence of events as well. The image of the mother at the centre, reflecting and revealing how close she is, to its heart must be an experience by itself. Further, images of the mother as a sinner- for the sins committed in the past birth, for sinful desires in the present, could have haunted the child for a very long time. This explains why the adult poet

persona remembers only those negative ideas stated by the villagers. We see/hear no one saying anything positive about the mother such as, 'the mother being a good woman, nothing can harm her'. Such a positive statement would have reined in some confidence in the speaker. The fact that only such pessimistic statements are remembered and recalled indicates the suppressed emotions surfacing almost erupting from the bottom most pit of the speaker's heart. Freud continued to view fixation as "the manifestation of very early linkages – linkages which it is hard to resolve – between instincts and impressions and the objects involved in those impressions". (Freud, *Psychopathology*, 137-8) This succinctly captures the boy's response to an event that happened so long back in the past, that were kept buried in the subconscious, only to surface later in his life.

The description of the father – as a 'rationalist, skeptic'- words with negative connotations, suggestive of a lack of sympathy for the mother and her pain, indicates a deep seated hatred for him. The fear of the father, makes the speaker say very little and very cryptically about him. It should have been worse for the child to see 'the flame feeding on my mother' – an action initiated by the father, stirring up images of the funeral pyre, in the young heart of the child. The chanting of mantras added morbidity to the plaguing images. It is the soft and tender feelings for the mother, and the subtle dislike for the father, that makes one wonder if the child is a young boy who speaks about this unforgettable event after he grew up. The memories he carried with him all his growing up years were cemented in his mind, perhaps because he felt deeply disturbed by it. The image of the mother suffering, and the unsympathetic father lighting fire to the bitten toe, could have repeatedly haunted him, that even after so many years, he is able to recall even the smallest facts of the incident. As a helpless observer, he feels the physical pain that the mother endured, vanished in twenty hours, while the emotional pain that he had to endure, is perhaps as alive now as it was at that eventful moment. This explains the Oedipus complex in the child as he carries the burden with him – could neither hold nor dislodge.

The powerful language of the poem reflects the haunted mind. The narrative along with the vivid imagery, unusual syntax, shifts, stops and crashes on towards building up a tense atmosphere, Mixture of sentences -Simple and complex together with direct and indirect voices in the narrative, enjambment and repetition/ anaphora of the cryptic 'they said', help create the disturbing atmosphere. The peasants' incantatory voices, surging with "more lanterns and more insects", the monotonous rain and the long hours spent in pain for the mother, the impatience of the father all add to the conundrum in the child's mind.

### **Summation**

Hence viewing the poem through the Freudian lens, renders it possible to understand why a simple, perhaps an absolutely commonplace event as a scorpion bite has remained buried in the child's mind, which the speaker chooses to share much later in his life.

The mother perseveres, despite the agony, all night, eventually triumphs without succumbing to the scorpion's venom. Unable to express her pain in words and producing

only groans right through the painful phase, her first words are uttered at the end to record her gratitude to the Almighty for choosing her over her children to endure the pain. She perhaps feels her children would have succumbed to the pain and the venom. The father, on the other hand, is a rational and unimpressed with the peasants and their beliefs. Caught in between these two ends of the spectrum is the young boy soaking up the atmosphere, swallowing the fear, even as he was trying to make sense of the superstitions, rituals, rites, and reactions. In short, it is possible to conclude that the little boy love for his mother and fear cum hatred towards his father is called Oedipus complex.

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## Reading Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* as a Study in Eco-Crime

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### *Abstract*

*The chasm between the environmentalisms of the poor and the rich and the discriminatory attitude towards human and non-human beings bring to mind the 'land ethic' of Aldo Leopold that extends the boundaries of a community to include soils, plants and animals. Mother Earth's most controversial 'offspring' has been perpetrating acts of eco-criminality and exploitation against his co-inhabitants, resulting in a situation of disequilibrium and crisis. Indra Sinha's seminal novel, *Animal's People*, takes the reader to the heart of the global environmental crisis and engages with the consequences of the 1984 toxic chemical spill in Bhopal. Set in the fictional Indian town of Khaufpur, the novel presents a thinly veiled representation of Bhopal some twenty years after the night of the explosion, chronicling the ongoing disasters – environmental, health, social, political and legal. *Animal's People*, through its depiction of the abandonment of the pesticide plant, necessitates rethinking of the morals and ethics that govern the 21st century ecological citizenship. It has become crucial to find ways of keeping the human community from destroying the natural community. The paper is an attempt to highlight what happens to an environment in the absence of land ethic as the world is intricately connected in ways that often escape our notice.*

*Keywords: eco-criminality, ecological citizenship, land ethic*

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Despite scepticism about criminology's capacity to help legislate for transnational environmental violations due to the anthropocentric and western bias it shares with criminal law, the fact that 'ordinary people' struggle against environmental victimisation on a daily basis presents an urgent moral challenge to our 'criminological imagination' to help diagnose, deter, prevent and criminalize such procedures and devious machinations. Multilateral treaties to address the illegal wildlife trade in endangered species; the smuggling of ozone-depleting substances; the dumping of hazardous waste from developed countries into the less developed countries; and illegal timber logging to name a few, ensure that these crimes are liable for prosecution. The criminological implication here is that rather than focussing on establishing preventive legislation or defining eco-crime, it is necessary to work from the basis of environmental violence's effects on people and the ecologies that support them. Framing the Bhopal disaster specifically as eco-crime is useful only if such legislation is responsive to how affected subjects experience and represent environmental violence, acknowledging for instance how the absence of the word

'environment' from Sinha's text suggests the need for more profound epistemological shifts regarding its criminological treatment .

There was, most assuredly, a double standard in the Union Carbide–India and Union Carbide–sister plants that must not be effaced. Nonetheless, mobilizing Bhopal as metaphor helps to keep it in the public imagination, supplying an ongoing symbol to touch and alarm the cultural nerve fibres of world-risk society. Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* contributes to the transnational visibility of the consequences of an ecological tragedy in a post-colonial land. It depicts an environment left disabled due to the discriminatory economic policies that fail to take into account the vulnerability of post-colonial environments in terms of social and physical conditions, leading to multi-level damages.

On the night of December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1984, the Union Carbide pesticide plant in Bhopal, leaked forty tons of deadly methyl isocyanate gas into the air, resulting in the immediate death of thousands of people. For thousands of others, death arrived gradually; for the next generations, gas-related cancers, illnesses, injuries preserved the legacy of that night. Disparate and sparring narratives surfaced in the aftermath, all of which attempted to salvage meaning from the raw material of disaster. Union Carbide presented Bhopal as a unique and singular accident, one that “couldn't happen in the United States” and that ended with the dispersal of cash settlements (Fortune 12). Indra Sinha's novel functions as an urban analogue depicting the crisis as being suspended in a state of irresolution. The Kampani, a stand-in for Union Carbide, skirts accountability through mechanisms of endless deferrals, leaving their impoverished victims few avenues for retribution. Rob Nixon's essay on *Animal's People* is part of the reason that this novel has become, as Lawrence Buell has suggested, a kind of paradigmatic text for contemporary ecocriticism, replacing Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* as representative of contemporary toxic discourse. Whereas Carson offered a pastoral-nostalgic memory of an idyllic middle-American town as eco-ethical norm to counter the health hazards of chemical pesticides, Sinha refuses this sort of nostalgia. Indeed, at one point, *Animal*, the protagonist-narrator, recalls a childhood memory of having enjoyed swimming in the lakes behind the Kampani's factory and dispels the very image of a bucolic past a few pages later by calling them “clay pits” (16).

Sinha chooses to tell his story from the perspective of this four-footed boy, *Animal*, who proudly cherishes his position as a member of the animal kingdom and rejects any attempts to push him higher in the chain of evolution. *Animal* himself represents a missing ring in the Darwinian chain of evolution, “free of ties and, where necessary, cruel and devoid of guilt” (Goodbody 187). Different members of the non-human world are shown expressing their verdict on events that affect their wellbeing and proceeding into action to execute their will. With his bones “twisted like a hairpin,” *Animal* gains an intimate understanding of the geography of Khaufpur. “From a height of eighteen inches,” he asserts, “you get to know a place very well, every crack in the road, every stone, every dropped, not-picked-up coin” (135). Deeply acquainted with the spatial arrangement of Khaufpur, he demonstrates a wealth of local knowledge shaped by his memory of that night: “That huddle of roofs, it's Jyotinar. Lanes in there are narrow; I don't like to think about what happened in them. My friend Faqri, he lost his mum and dad and five brothers

and sisters in those lanes" (31). Far from understanding the city through the logic of the market, *Animal* draws a map of Khaufpur through the lens of crisis and collective experience.

Sinha's *Animal* is fairly explicit about the likely privileged status of his readers – whom he calls “eyes” (14): “What can I say that they will understand? Have those thousands of eyes slept even one night in a place like this? Do these eyes shit on railway tracks?” (7). The ongoing effects of the chemical leakage have not only been visited disproportionately on the poor but have also been magnified by a byzantine suspension of justice that has allowed the various forms of malpractice, criminal violence and contempt to go largely unpunished. This is especially evident in the outrage arising from the limited liability settlement agreed by the Indian Supreme Court in 1989, which valued the lives of the dead at around \$2000 each and failed to account either for the myriad injuries caused by ecological toxicity or for cleaning up Bhopal's poisoned environment itself. Yet despite continuous challenges from the disaster's victims, Union Carbide and its current parent company, Dow Chemicals, persist in exploiting the gap between US legal jurisdiction over a 'foreign' case and the Indian court's incapacity to prosecute corporate actors who operated through a defunct subsidiary. The leak was no accident but a massacre that continues to exact human and animal deaths, and injuring more than half a million people in the decades since the explosion. Roos and Hunt (2010) bring forward the idea that 'justice' is a vital term in foregrounding the theoretical framework of post-colonial ecocriticism. Arguing that “environmental justice has moved ecocriticism to consider how disenfranchised or impoverished populations over the world face particular environmental problems”, they highlight the extent of environmental degradation particularly in the global south and assume that this type of degradation stems from the broken relationship between human beings and the environment or the animate and inanimate (Roos & Hunt 1). The dominance of the white, reasonable and able human beings over dehumanised groups and non-human environment is represented as the underlying reason behind the ecological disasters in post-colonial lands which end up with fatal consequences, both for human and non-human beings living in these areas.

The crisis represented by *Animal's People* concerns the fate of environments such as Bhopal where the nature of eco-criminality is at once manifestly transnational and imbricated in state interests, rendering small-scale governance limited in its capacity for opposition. The novel unsettles the human-animal dichotomy that is one of the dualist forms of thought, which environmental philosophers such as Val Plumwood claim underlies environmental crisis as well as colonialist discourses (120). Domination over nature and the non-human world is defined as an “inevitable act in the history of civilization” (Arikan 38). The correspondence between anthropocentrism and Western-centrism leads to discriminatory approaches towards not only dehumanized beings but also non-human nature. Ecocritical engagement with postcolonial discourse suggests that this correspondence goes beyond the concerns of racism and evolves into environmental racism that threatens the sustainability of the planet earth through malpractices particularly in the global south. Curtin's claim of “a self-perceived 'center' of power and civilization exploiting 'distant' places and peoples for its economic benefit” (19), brings out the parallel between the



oppression of races and environments.

The question of “spatial politics of environmental toxicity” (DeLoughrey & Handley 216) stands underlined in the environmental tragedy of Khaufpur/Bhopal, where the region was targeted for 'development' after having been assessed as 'backward'. An eco-crime materialized under the ownership of an American multinational company, engaged in moving toxicity from the global north to the global south, in the name of 'progress'. The environmental issues, hence, took a backseat in comparison with the economic interests. Khaufpur is portrayed as a place where irresponsible industrialization has backfired in the form of anti-developmental repercussions like the chemical disaster, malnutrition and crumbling of nature. The pesticide plant built by the Kampani in Khaufpur to enhance agricultural output turns into a biocidal attack, resulting in environmental contamination and 'slow violence'. The poisoned environment of Khaufpur yields poisoned and unnatural vegetation depicted thus by *Animal*, who resides in the dead factory: “a forest is growing, tall grasses, bushes, trees, creepers that shoot sprays of flowers like fireworks” (29).

*Animal's People* is fully engaged in the act of subverting the encapsulating of the disaster within the logic of the market. The events of that night mark the bodies of the Khaufpuri citizens, thereby foregrounding the ongoing nature of the crisis: Somraj Pandit, a local music teacher, loses his lung capacity and consequently, the ability to sing; jars of partially formed fetuses line the shelves of a local doctor's clinic and most notably, *Animal*, the quadruped protagonist, navigates the streets of Khaufpur on all fours, his curved backbone a testament to corporate irresponsibility. While it is true that *Animal's* physical form may serve as a “bodily shorthand for Khaufpur's transnational plight”, and that in many scenes “his posture is precisely that of a beast of burden” (Nixon 450), his insistence on being non-human points towards his status as 'other'. *Animal*, as a toxic and disabled body, embodies the environmental crisis that Khaufpur has been through since the gas-leak in 1984. His body presents “the medium through which injustice is experienced, understood, and combated” (Ray 103). *Animal* and his people live with the chemicals just like the factory that was abandoned with the dangerous chemicals inside. A concrete embodiment of the disaster, *Animal's* body is turned into an exotic object to be seen by the visitors, the curiosity of whose gaze “feels like acid” (Sinha 7) on his skin. This troubling gaze symbolizes the continuation of toxic penetration into his body, ripping him of his humanity and making him feel like a non-human. The identification of the non-western races as animalistic in the colonial period finds a parallel in the identification of *Animal* as an 'animal', making him an 'ecological other'. His reflection upon his disfigurement shapes his mental and physical actions, stopping him from placing himself among healthy and productive males. It becomes impossible for him to believe in the existence of a proper mate for himself, which causes him to suffer from a psychological disorder called voyeurism. This results in his frequent involvement in voyeuristic activities while spying on Elli Barber, the American doctor who came to Khaufpur to open a free clinic, and on Nisha, *Animal's* love interest. The novel portrays that an unhealthy environment gives rise to an unhealthy body which supports Alaimo's claim that the well-being of human beings cannot be considered independent of the rest of the planet (Alaimo 18). Another toxic body suffering from disability is *Animal's* adoptive mother Ma Franci, who begins to suffer from a kind of

aphasia after the gas-leak:

On that night all sorts of people lost all kinds of things, lives for sure, families, friends, health, jobs, in some cases their wits. This poor woman, Ma Franci, lost all knowledge of Hindi. (37)

She forgets all the languages she knew except her native language, French, and is left grappling with “stupid grunts and sounds” (37). This communication disorder limits her capacity to help the Khaufpuris, driving them into despair on all fronts. By often using the metaphor 'apokalis'(apocalypse) (63), Ma Franci might prophesy that the earth and its inhabitants come closer to an eco-apocalypse everyday with their anti-ecological and environmentally racist practices. Based on the notion of environmental racism (Huggan & Tiffin 5), postcolonial ecocriticism argues that those living in the global south such as the Khaufpuris are more vulnerable to exploitation and ecological alienation due to neo-colonial practices threatening sustainability in the global south.

One of the youngest victims of the Kampani, Kha-in-the-Jar, the unborn two-headed foetus, narrates stories about the ramifications of unjust decisions and unhealthy practices in Khaufpur. The decisions to build the factory in Khaufpur, to decrease the safety precautions at the plant due to their costs and not to remove the plant from the land even after the disaster, all result in the emergence of disabled generations and environments that endanger global sustainability at the human and non-human level. This highlights the fact that the present generations potentially have control over the lives of the future generations through such irresponsible decisions. The twentieth and twenty-first centuries witness an upsurge in the ecological degradation and exploitation of the socially and economically disadvantaged subjects and their lands.

There has been much debate about the extent of the destructive impact of colonialism on nature. The classification of nature was a critical element in the rationalizing gaze of colonialism: the 'othering' of nature in science, art and society is the 'ideological practice that enables us to plunder it' (Katz and Kirby 265). Colonial scientific discourses about nature drew on pre-existing views of nature in the colonial periphery, taking possession, institutionalizing and re-exporting them to the colonized world. Colonialism promoted the naming and classification of people and places, as well as nature, with the aim of control. It favoured modern techno-scientific knowledge over folk knowledge, and privileged centralised and formalised ways of knowing nature over localised and informal ways. In the colonial mind, nature was 'out there' and the possibility of knowing human engagement with nature was rarely considered. *Animal's People* deals with schisms produced within humanity by inscribing coloniality onto the minds of people and promulgating the logic of objectification. This colonial logic of objectification is based upon the “thing-ification” (Aime Cesaire 42) of the so-called subaltern people and the non-human world. The living environment and other species are not seen as subjects in their own right, but as objects that can be mastered and exploited.

For these 'objectified' characters armed with the power of nothing, what they can

withhold is their bodies, and in this way the novel, *Animal's People*, stages a kind of boycott. When an American woman, Elli, comes to town to open a new, free clinic, the Khaufpuris are understandably suspicious that the Kampani might be funding it, since the Kampani would have an interest in reading the data their bodies might produce in ways that shift responsibility off of itself. Zafar, the social activist, notes the coincidence of a major court victory for the victims of 'that night' and the government's approval of the free clinic. In this case, the turning of bodies into data and the expert knowledge necessary for its deciphering becomes just one more means to the end of abdicating corporate responsibility.

The whole world may not be literally in Khaufpur, but insofar as Khaufpur, like Bhopal, is a poisoned city among others, the whole world may be characterized by the slow apocalypse. Indeed, one of Sinha's most colourful characters, Kha-in-the-Jar, informs *Animal* that everyone on this earth has in their body a share of the Kampani's poisons. This, too, might be taken as metaphor, but reading Sinha's Kampani as Union Carbide, suggests something more literal. Union Carbide had been, after all, long involved in the nuclear industry, processing uranium and plutonium at facilities in Kentucky and New York. When, in *Animal's People*, Zafar has a dream in which he sees the Kampani as a giant edifice whose basements contain bunkers full of atomic explosives, this is a revelation of a historical fact. Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* contributes to the transnational visibility of the consequences of an ecological tragedy in a post-colonial land. It depicts an environment left disabled due to the discriminatory economic policies that fail to take into account the vulnerability of post-colonial environments in terms of social and physical conditions, leading to multi-level damages.

The self-placement of 'man at the centre' has disallowed a vantage point from which any need or desire for limiting human expansionism might be discerned. By virtue of how it constituted itself, human-centredness has spawned an enterprise that can only go on perilously. *Animal's People* represents a geological epoch where human beings are the perpetrators as well as the victims of the degradations they have been instrumental in bringing about, out of their unending greed and apathy. It is imperative to recall Aldo Leopold: "Land ethic changes the role of Homo Sapiens from conqueror of the land community to plain member and citizen of it" (204). A call for limitations must come from within a society's horizon in one of two ways: either from inner restraint arising from respect toward others or from external resistance successfully thwarting that society's expansionism. Moral consideration for non-humans (as well as for devalued humans), and respect for their intrinsic being and homelands must be awakened to halt the advent of the civilized conqueror.

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## North-South Cultural Divide: A Study of Chetan Bhagat's *2 States* and its Cinematic Adaptation

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### *Abstract*

*India, the largest democracy in the world, is known for its unity in diversity. The world looks up to India for its multiplicity and plurality which have endowed the Indian writers an array of subjects that help in portraying Indian society in a holistic manner. Unlike the portrayal of multi splendoured vignettes of India that adorn the literary landscape, Chetan Bhagat explores current sensitive issues that bedevil national and cultural ethos in a fast changing world scenario. His works mainly focus on youth and/or college students and their life centered around professional realities, education system, anxieties and a host of social issues. Doubtlessly, Chetan Bhagat's oeuvre has attracted the attention of many filmmakers. The present paper attempts to explore the dynamics of Indian society portrayed in Chetan Bhagat's novel, *2 States* and its cinematic adaptation.*

*Keywords: Literature, Indian society, culture, cinematic adaptation, 2 States*

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The *raison d'être* of both literature and cinema is to “instruct and delight.” In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, literature was an important vehicle of creative expression but of late, cinema has emerged as the universal art primarily due to its ability to connect with people across nations, cultures and categories. Thus, cinema stands out today as the most unifying of the art forms. In fact, since the beginning of cinema, literature has always been an attractive source for film makers. Scores of films have been produced in Indian film industry based on literary classics. Interestingly, cinema acts as the alter ego of literature, throwing light on socio-political realities. Both literature and cinema are capable of encapsulating the moments of exhilaration as well as exasperation in the lives of a wide spectrum of characters portrayed in their respective domain.

India as a multi religious and multicultural nation offers challenging possibilities to creative writers and filmmakers that enables them to focus on issues related to culture, tradition, caste system, patriarchy, ethnicity and so on. Indian writers in English have been concerned about the clash of cultures at the level of people and at the level of ideas right from Sarath Kumar Ghosh to Raja Rao, followed by Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Arun Joshi and Chaman Nahal. Anita Desai, who has close encounters in a multicultural background, born to a Bengali father and a German mother, brought up in an Indian atmosphere and later married, an Indian businessman, depicts issues related to cross-cultural interactions with deep insight. She claimed, “My roots are

divided because of the Indian soil on which I grew and European culture which I inherited from my mother" (Kalpana, 1991).

Among the contemporary crop of creative writers, Chetan Bhagat, a trained Technocrat and Management professional, writes about the professional and existential dilemmas of the youth in his novels. In spite of the absence of liturgical quality in his fiction, Chetan Bhagat occupies the centre stage in the Indian creative scene and is highly selling and celebrated living author in India, and "more importantly, he is a successful and popular writer" (NYT 26<sup>th</sup> Mar. 2008). While commenting on his success as a bestseller, Chetan Bhagat said, "I think people really took to the books mainly because there is a lot of social comment in there . . . It's garbed as comedy." (NYT 26<sup>th</sup> Mar. 2008). It is interesting to note that he represents a new breed of writers, vocal and expressive in an experiential way. Though his novels deal with the challenges and turbulences of present generation, he has touched upon those sensitive issues as crisis of culture with an ease that is informed by freshness. As a consequence, many filmmakers have found his *oeuvre* worthy of cinematic adaptations.

Chetan Bhagat's novel *2 States: The Story of My Marriage* is a story of his own life. The film "2 States," a visual representation of the novel *2 States: The Story of My Marriage* presents adaptation of cultures in Indian Society. Chetan and his wife Ananya had to struggle to get their love accepted by their parents. It is a love story of two lovers who belong to different states, castes and cultures and they want to enter into wedlock. It can be said that the socio-cultural conflict between two cultures--North and South--is the central plot of the story. He has dedicated the novel to his in-laws. In the acknowledgement of *2 States* Chetan Bhagat writes: I also want to make a couple of disclaimers. One, this story is inspired by my own family and experiences. However, this book should be seen as a work of fiction. Also, for authenticity, I have used names of some real places, people and institutions as they represent cultural icons of today and aid in storytelling. There is no intention to imply anything else. I'd also like to tell all South Indians I love them (Bhagat, *2 States*, vii). The novel was written in the year 2009 and the film based on it was directed by Abhishek Vermon, produced by Karan Johar and Sajid Nadiadwala and stars Arjun Kapoor and Alia Bhatt in lead roles.

The lead characters of the novel are Krish Malhotra, a north Indian Punjabi boy and Ananya Swaminathan, a Tamilian Brahmin girl. Ananya, from an economics background, is beautiful and the most talked about girl at the campus of I.I.M. Ahmedabad, while Krish is an I.I.T. graduate. No sooner they bond as besties and their friendship turns into love. After the completion of the course both of them secure jobs in the companies of their choice. Subsequent to settling in jobs, Krish proposes to Ananya for marriage. Though they both were happy to take their relationship a step further and settle in personal life as well, their families were against it. The apparent fact for the disapproval being they both hail from different states and their cultures are different. As Indian society is not liberal for mixed marriages between different castes, religion or geographies, Krish and Ananya who hail from two different states in India, face hardships in convincing their parents for the acceptance of their relationship, and yet persist in seeking their consent and blessings.

India is believed to be a nation of tolerance, peace, and harmonious coexistence. If that is true, why is there a cultural and religious divide amongst Indian masses? Are Indians rigid and heartless or are their cultural ethos very strong? Chetan Bhagat's book raises these questions and points out the prevalent racism in India. The cultural and regional differences lead to a social divide that at times acquires an ugly face and monstrous magnitude. It is a known fact that more than personal reasons related to the boy or girl in the context, the fear and intolerance of the family members is given the names like 'values/culture' etc. Negotiating the cultural space, retaining their identity, is the main reason for these silent sacrifices.

As the narrative unfolds, an India marriage is not only about the couple but also about the family that gets bonded for lifetime. Chetan Bhagat writes on the back cover of the book that love marriages are less complicated all over the world but such is not the case with Indian society.

Love marriages around the world are simple: Boy loves girl. Girl loves boy. They get married. In India, there are few more steps: Boy loves girl. Girl loves boy. Girl's family has to love boy. Boy's family has to love girl. Girl's family has to love boy's family. Boy's family has to love girl's family. Girl and boy still love each other. They get married. (2 States- Cover Page)

The author and the filmmaker portray the Indian society in good faith. The issues of differences between natives of two states with regard to their culture, food habits, lifestyle etc., alongside sub-plots, have been depicted by the novelist and the same issues were focused by the film director. The sub-story of marriage ceremony of Krish's cousin with Duke adds to reiterating the author's concern in a convincing manner. Meena Iyer of the *The Times of India* wrote, "What makes 2 States work as the simple narrative told humorously. Adapted as it is from one of author Chetan Bhagat's best selling works, the film just like the book before it, is light hearted. Chetan's funny one liners and life view are studiously borrowed by director for screen outing, and though there is a sense of *déjà-vu* for those who have read the book, the movie still managed to charm and surprise." (*Times of India*, 25<sup>th</sup> April. 2016).

The novel explores how interstate and inter caste marriages are still seen as unacceptable in Indian society. There are important incidents related to cultural clashes presented by the novelist that are finely adapted by the filmmaker. For instance, the scene when Krish and Ananya go out for lunch their conversation shows difference in their cultural anchoring and outlook:

She laughed. 'I didn't say I am a practising Tam Brahm. But you should know that I am born into the purest of pure upper caste communities ever created. What about you, commoner?' 'I am a Punjabi, though I never lived in Punjab. I grew up in Delhi. And I have no idea about my caste, but we do eat chicken. And I can digest bad sambhar better than Tamil Brahmins,' I said. (2 States, 7)

Pride also raises its head when one family believes that the other's culture or beliefs are inferior or strange, thereby discounting the other person's social status and importance in the relationship. Krish's mother and Ananya's parent meets in the convocation. Krish's mother makes a remark on Ananya's family by addressing them as Madrasi. She thinks Ananya is 'trapping' her son. She makes a comment: "These South Indians don't know how to control their daughters. From Hema Malini to Sridevi, all of them trying to catch Punjabi men" (*2 States*, 48). Both, Krish and Ananya, assumed the meeting of their parents at the convocation will brighten the prospects of a happy wedding for them but the situation turned out contrary to their assumptions. The cultural and linguistic differences took a toll and their hope was shattered.

Communication can be one of the biggest difficulties in intercultural marriages. This can include the challenge of speaking different languages. Communication that is the lifeline of any relationship becomes an issue, affecting the way a couple solves problems. Chetan Bhagat points out the language and culture barrier for North Indians in Southern region of India. The novelist portrays the socio-cultural alienation in his novel with existential spirit. When Krish Malhotra reached Chennai, the novelist presents his initial reaction as:

I saw the city. It had the usual Indian elements like auto, packed public buses, hassled traffic cops and tiny shops that sold groceries, fruits, utensils, clothes or novelty items. However, it did feel different. First, the sign in every shop was in Tamil. The font resembles those optical illusion puzzles that give you a headache if you stare at them long enough. Tamil women, all of them, wear flowers in their hair. Tamil men don't believe in pant and wear lungis even in shopping districts. The city is filled with film posters. The heroes' pictures make you feel even your uncles can be movie stars. The heroes are fat, balding, have thick moustaches and the heroine next to them is a ravishing beauty. Maybe my mother has a point in saying that the Tamil women have a thing for North Indian men. (*2 States*, 77-78)

A thrilling external motivation that a hero is desperate to achieve by the end of the story is an important ingredient in film adaptations. The filmmaker adapted incidents from *2 States* to cater to the taste of moviegoers. The Convocation incident sets the scene for rising action and tension. Krish's mother Kavita, a typical Punjaban, does not get along with Ananya's reserved Tamilian parents Radha and Swaminathan.

After graduation, Ananya takes up a marketing job in her hometown Chennai and Krish returns to his own hometown Delhi, with the choice of workplace in his own hands. Krish's mother urges him to stay in Delhi and discourages him for his interest in writing. His family condemns his relationship with Ananya, and advised him to agree for an arranged marriage with a Punjabi girl. The strained relationship between father and son was a potential scene for Cinematic adaptation. An apparent cold reserve between Krish and his alcoholic father Vikram is superbly described by the novelist and skillfully adapted by the producer of the film.



Against the wishes of his mother, Krish accepts a banking job in Chennai with the belief that he will convince Ananya's parents. During this time, he tries very hard to win over Ananya's family. He teaches her younger brother for IIT entrance exams, he organizes a concert of her mother at an event for his workplace and helps her father in creating his first Power Point presentation. He arranges a dinner party to convince Ananya's parents to accept him as their son-in-law. He utters: "I, Krish Malhotra, would like to propose to all of you. Will all of you marry me?" I said and held the four boxes in my palm" (2 States 183). Ananya's mother feels insecure about her daughter because Krish is a Punjabi boy so she said: "It is not that we don't like you. But our communities..." (2 States, 184) With his earnest attempts and perseverance, Krish succeeds in convincing Ananya's family members for marriage. The focus turns towards Krish's family. It was Ananya's turn to win the love and acceptance of Krish's family. Krish and Ananya travel to Delhi. Initially, Kavita and her family are hostile towards Ananya. They do not like Ananya and they think that Krish should not marry Ananya because she is Madarasi. But they come to like her after she saves Krish's cousin's wedding from being canceled due to a dispute over dowry. After solving the problem, Ananya also wins the love of Krish's family.

Krish and Ananya decide to take a vacation and arrange a meeting of their families before their wedding. Once again to their dismay, the vacation does not go as assumed. Kavita, Krish's loud mother, makes continuous derogatory remarks: 'You must be jumping with joy inside. Where will you find such a qualified boy like him.' (2 States, 226) to this Ananya's mother replies 'Actually, we do get qualified boys. Tamils value education a lot. All her uncles are engineers or doctors. Ananya had many matches from the USA.' (2 States 226). Further, Ananya and her parents overhear Krish convincing his mother that she can mould Ananya as she wants after they are married. They misunderstood him without realising his false assurance was just to cajole his mother. Ananya, a victim to the situation, breaks up with Krish and both part and take way to their respective hometowns. Krish tries to convince Ananya but she does not listen anymore as she feels hurt and insulted. Krish's father, sensing Krish and Ananya's love for each other and their pangs of love, goes to Chennai to meet Ananya's family and convince them by apologizing for his wife's behavior. Thus, with the interference of his father, Krish wish of marrying Ananya gets fulfilled. They get married and lead a happy life. In due course they become parents to twin boys and Krish resigns from banking and publishes his book *2 States* based on his and Ananya's life.

Ananya and Krish struggled hard to get married; in spite of all their efforts, without the help of Krish's father, their marriage would not have been impossible. There are many subtle differences and complexities in Indian culture. India is a land of diversity yet people are not liberal for mixed marriages between different geographies, religions or castes. Both the book and the movie explore as to how Krish and Ananya suffer a lot, in their pursuit of a happy wedding, because of regional and cultural differences. The book also shows the Indian mentality of not accepting inter-caste marriages. The writer and the filmmaker both explain about northern and southern cultures impartially.

In general, the success of any marriage depends on love, patience, tolerance, maturity, respect, compromise and accommodating one another's contrasting ways of

perceiving life. Whereas, in particular an inter caste and intercultural marriage demands all the aforementioned elements of compatibility along with extra efforts to make it successful. Both partners have to be flexible and open-minded when facing unexpected arguments and issues. The romance in intercultural marriages should transform into mature meaningful companionship with a strong commitment to overcome all challenges.

In the globalized world the clash between the Oriental and Occidental culture still continues which is an outright violation of the international assumption that each culture is autonomous and free to retain its colors and flavors. The dominance and influence of one culture over the other leads to social disharmony, unrest and friction. Anita Desai's *Bye Bye, Black Bird* mirrors up the cultural clash in Dev's marriage to Sarah, a British girl. Ruth Jhabvala, Arun Joshi, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandaya and Chaman Nahal have fictionalized cultural encounters in their works. With Indian society sharply divided among four *varunas* and the endogamous marriages the only option within them, exogamous marriages are frowned upon and in the contemporary India cases of honour killings are on the rise. Each region of India prides itself in the uniqueness of its culture, thereby demonstrating its disdain for the possible delinquents. Sporadic instances of intercultural marriages in India are numerically negligible. Given the multiplicity of cultures, sub cultures, languages, dialects, dresses and diets of the people of Indian sub continent, the time is ripe for "diversity in unity" (Agarwal, 5).

The author of this article has scrupulously followed various approaches and stratagems adopted by the main protagonists to work out a harmonious, honorable and mutually acceptable solution for solemnizing the inter-cultural and inter-caste marriages without hurting the cultural sensitivities of their parents. Drastic changes engulfing the world and its citizens have impacted vast number of people. With the winds of change sweeping the globe, India with its plural character, cannot be insensitive to its global milieu. The I.T. revolution, explosion of information and exodus of Indian scholars to foreign shores have brought about a sea change in the social scenario. No doubt, Chetan Bhagat's novel, *2 States* is autobiographical in tone and tenor yet it translates the dilemmas of innumerable young men and women in finding the soul mate. Hence, the inescapable conclusion is that complex and deeply rooted socio-cultural problems of multicultural India are attributable to generation, communication and cultural gaps that bedevil the course of human beings to achieve genuine relationship. Krish Malhotra and Ananya Swaminathan in *2 States* eventually succeed in cementing their love in the bond of marriage by surmounting the cultural barriers erected by prejudices rooted in ignorance and spurious assumptions of superiority.

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## Revisiting the *Ramayana*: Engagements with Liminality

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### *Abstract*

*Liminality, or the in-between, “neither here, nor there” stage of indeterminacy and transience offers a great potential for alteration and subversion. Originated as an anthropological concept first in the works of ethnographer, Arnold van Gennep and later borrowed and popularized by cultural anthropologist Victor Turner, the scope of the term 'liminality' expanded from a mere concept to an approach for understanding the patterns of identity formation via transitions. The present paper focuses on the application of liminality as a theoretical frame to introduce new possible paradigm of meaning-making in the ancient Indian classic the Ramayana. The present study is an attempt to go beyond the inherent religiosity of the Ramayana and tap into the potential for a literary and critical analysis of its narratology. The 'tale of Rama' as a narrative of 'rites of passage' ushers the existent social structure into an altered and dynamic liminal space. Using the 'processual' framework of liminality, the paper analyses the cultural and mythological universe of Ramayana, tracing the progression of its narrative alongside the liminal journey of its protagonist Rama, whose presence as a 'master' allows its various characters to engage with their own unique 'rites of passage' and eventually being steered out of their liminality. In this regard, the paper explores the position and function of the 'master' performer and distinguishes the often overlapping and incorrectly substituted concepts of 'marginality' and 'liminality'. The paper, while revisiting the Ramayana, contends for a shift from its 'only' emphasized religiosity to the artistic configuration of anthropological experiences.*

*Keywords: Liminality, narratology, transition, marginality, processual subversion*

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The term 'liminality,' derived from the Latin word 'limen' or 'threshold,' can be credited to the French ethnographer Arnold van Gennep, known for his contributions to

the study of ritual ceremonies through his 1909 work, *Les Rites de Passage* or 'rites of passage.'<sup>1</sup> Gennep's work described a three-stage structure through which an individual passes, as people do undergo transition from one life phase to another. The first stage starts with the rite of separation, wherein exists a symbolic as well as often physical detaching from the previous state of being, The second stage is marked by the separated individual undergoing a transformative rite in the form of transition or liminal period, followed by the later and last rite of re-assimilation or incorporation. Gennep's work on the "tripartite structure" of liminality had its most typical model situated in the initiation of the coming-of-age rituals and marriages, births and deaths, etc.

In the second-half of the twentieth century, the terms 'liminal' and 'liminality' were borrowed and popularized by cultural anthropologist Victor Turner, whose exhaustive analysis on the rituals and rites of the Ndembu tribe from Zambia in the form of the theories of 'Liminality and Communitas' from *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* offered stimulating insight into the dynamics and interdependence of the social structure and process of interaction. While Turner expanded Gennep's concepts, his special interest appeared to be in the second phase of Gennep's model of liminality: an intervening period where liminal entities are "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony" (95). He extended his analysis to many 'rituals' as they have come to be an intrinsic part of modern life, necessary for sustaining the social structure and the transitions in between them. Expounding the concept of liminality, in his major article, "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbolology" (1974), Turner came up with the term 'liminoid' to explain the occurrence of "liminal" nature of many such phenomena and experiences of the "modern consumerist societies ... where creativity and uncertainty unfold in art and leisure activities" (Thomassen, 15).

The concept of liminality has ever since, branched off into various disciplines outside its anthropological origin. The occurrence of 'liminoid' as a concept has further expanded the usage and identification of liminality into various domains, such as, theatres, war, riots, revolutions, economic crises, disaster, etc. as "liminality is about how human beings, in their various social and cultural contexts, deal with change." The difference, however, between liminality and the subsequent concept of liminoid lies in the absence of one of the important properties of liminality- *transition*, as is pointed out by the social scientist and anthropologist, Bjørn Thomassen. Liminality is marked with ambiguity and middle stage but ultimately ends up with transformation experienced at the completion of rite. However, liminoid despite having the features of a liminal experience is not bound with the finality of transition. It may not ensure the complete resolution of the 'in-between' crisis undergone by a subject.

In one of his consequential articles titled, "The Uses and Meaning of Liminality," Thomassen introduces and discusses various dimensions of liminality--spatial and temporal--and as experienced by all three "subjects:" individuals, groups, or even society or entire civilization as a whole. These experiences are marked by a customary shift or

transition, involving a temporary middle stage of the liminal phase wherein an ambiguous limbo of sorts descends, allowing the participants to engage with an altered, reversed state of hierarchies, norms, and structure, and experience an otherworldly existence in a way, before being ushered out of it. The degrees of these liminal experiences may vary, and could also be “artificially produced” as in the case of rituals, or could be sought by individuals for some specific purposes. Thomassen also mentions an alternative liminal position, one that comprises individuals or groups where they may not have necessarily “asked for” this position. The category is important in the sense that it opens up a discourse on the tricky and often overlapping theoretical formulations of liminality versus marginality. Whereas marginality is generally imposed and is associated with forced alienation that devoid the 'marginalized' subject of its fundamental rights to partake in socio-cultural, political and other spheres, liminality may be naturally incurred or deliberately sought. It may be a part of natural life-cycle or normal course of experience or might be initiated by the subject itself for assuming a new and changed identity. Unlike a marginal individual, the liminal subject may stand outside society 'by choice' in pursuit of the desired transition as well as for accomplishing the ultimately intended transformation.

Among disciplines of study, liminality, not unlike its own fluid constitution, finds relevance and functionality in a wide range of subjects, prominent among are, sociology, political science, philosophy, psychology, and the study of experience, medicine, literature, alongside many theoretical and critical discourses, ranging from Derridian deconstruction, Lacanian psychoanalysis, to even Foucauldian and Deleuzian philosophy. A remarkable and equally challenging attribute of liminality is perhaps, its refusal to subscribe and limit itself to any specific '-isms' or ideology, as was also perhaps intended by Genep and later, retained and stressed upon by Turner through his rendering of liminality as a “processual approach.” The state of flux in the definition of liminality has continued up till the present day. A discourse wherein the concept has found much application and is employed in significant ways is the field of literature. The process of writing itself has often been compared to a liminal experience, as is reading, staging, or consuming any piece of literature or even art as a whole. The focus here, however, is on the craft of writing, especially fiction, and the numerous ways in which liminality aids or adds to the process. Turner's own ideas with regard to this have been discussed in an essay titled, “The Literary Roots of Victor Turner” by his wife and anthropologist, Edith Turner, wherein she talks about Turner's early interest in literature and how liminality as an interpretative concept could be carried forward to analyze various literary works. The further development of the idea of literary engagement with liminality, deriving from Victor's own interest extending beyond liminality to his concept of the liminoid, could be found in the modern culture and its associated modes of artistic expression:

He was quite aware that his anthropological studies had implications for the study of literature in almost every one of their aspects - the study of symbolism, the work on social drama, the consciousness of the rite of passage, and the knowledge of the breakup of the overburdened rituals of the Middle Ages into the liminoid artistic and entertainment genres of today. (164)

Subsequently, liminality in literature and its accompanying critical discourses has broadened itself from merely its semiotic origins to various stylistic features. Its implication has extended to designating a place among the techniques of narration, which are examined via the extra-textual elements present, as they often herald a liminal transformation in the story, much required for the progression of the narrative. Genres such as the gothic, detective fiction, postcolonial writings too, make use of liminality for subtle suggestions. It includes many narrative strategies and rhetorical devices such as--accordingly creating an atmosphere of horror, suspense, ambiguity, and subversion of norm and hierarchies. Often, the characters in a story themselves exhibit this 'in-between' property of not belonging to one category. Such 'liminal beings', as were not left unnoticed by Turner too, occupy a veritable space in the mythological universe and literature that comes from diverse civilizations all across. It makes 'liminality' an omnipresent element of narrative design, in one or the other form. While liminal beings and liminal spaces may not necessarily be present in each fictional narrative, a trope of narration drawing upon liminality can be commonly observed in the stories. It may be related with the manner in which a narrative progresses through the hero's liminal journey.

The three-partite structure suggested by Gennep and Turner of ritual initiation has often been inferred by thinkers to constitute a pattern, in a way, for all human experience and identity formation. If the processual approach of liminality is brought forward to critically examine the purposes served in the epics, it can be easily located in the narrative design itself. Like carrying forward the idea of progression of a narrative through the three stage liminal journey of the hero is surely present in the mythological terrain of almost all cultural currents. Its unusual repetition in the ancient Indian epic narrative, *Ramayana*, is an observation that piques one's curiosity, as such an occurrence may not be purely a coincidence, and if investigated it may open up new paradigms of meaning-making in a text that largely eludes concretized narratological analysis in favor of its implanted religious significance.

Indubitably, the *Ramayana* has a glorious tradition of historical, philosophical, literary (usually in languages Sanskrit, English, and other vernaculars) and theological investigation, especially in India and South-East Asia. Yet, the inherent religiosity of the text, alongside the issue of multiple renditions of the story, divided especially between the Northern and Southern part of India as well as the neighboring countries, owing to the numerous redactions of a tale that was likely birthed in the oral literary tradition, has limited these studies to examine the *Ramayana* from a historical or anthropological perspective. It has also curtailed, at least to some extent, its investigation as a text of Hindu values, culture, rituals, as a philosophical treatise on kingship, or as a work for elaborating upon the poetics and stylistics of the Sanskrit language. While reviewed through the lens of literary criticism, studies on the *Ramayana* as a literary epic are relatively less and vaguely patterned around problematizing the treatment of women and minorities in the strong patriarchal setup of the epic that brings out the frequently quoted discursive status of 'marginalized' characters. Applying a new frame to examine this age old classic helps to

overcome this limitation, apparent in the already existing textual analysis. The present investigation develops an insight into the fictional spectrum of the said work by exploring the *Ramayana* as a work of art that engages with liminality to shape its characters' experiences, identity and status, and lends new extended meaning to the mythological universe of the narrative.

If the multi-layered, 24000 verses of the seven *Kaandas* (or Cantos) of the *Valmiki Ramayana* is considered as a singular composite text, wherein all its mini-narratives and subsidiary characters indeed appear structured around the incarnated, larger-than-life figure of the just and righteous protagonist Rama, the potential of liminal experience instantly surfaces. In fact, Rama himself is placed in a transitory phase as an *avatar* of the Hindu god Vishnu born as a mortal human on earth, designating him the status of demi-god (part human-part god). It can be elucidated how Rama, himself traversing through a liminal phase, creates a landscape of liminality. It induces the associated characters to engage with this liminal space, initiating them into their own unique 'rites of passage' that often exhibit a pattern of concluding in some form of redemption experienced by the initiator.

The land of Ayodhya seems to be existing in a pre-liminal stage of mild unease, anticipating a worthy heir and 'master' to allow the kingdom to undergo a transformative epoch of liminality that would be initiated with the birth of Rama. Later, in the first canto or *Baala Kaanda*, the episode of the accursed Ahalya, wife of the sage Maharishi Gautam, who has been suspended into a limbo of sorts for thousands of years as a punishment for her betrayal to her husband, is initiated out of her enforced liminality when the young Rama's feet find her "indiscernible to all the three worlds" (or dust or stone) existence, rendering her 'rite of passage' complete. The translation of 13-15 slokas in Chapter1, Sarga 49 reads:

She whose splendour is brightened by her asceticism, ... is hitherto enshrouded by the dried up leaves and dust, who is like an unwatchable sunshine mirrored in and glowing from the midst of water, for she is hitherto in the midst of denounce, and whose limbs are like the tongues of a flaring fire around which fumes are cloaking, as she is hitherto practising an utmost asceticism subsisting on air alone, which asceticism alone made her like a flaring Ritual Fire, and Rama has seen such a highly glorious Ahalya. [Valmiki (Trans.), 13-15] (i)

Later, the *Aranya* or *Forest Kaanda* that begins with a fourteen-year long exile of Rama, accompanied by his wife Sita and brother Lakshman weaves another intricate liminal landscape into the narrative. Lakshman, who out of pure devotion to and reverence for his brother, leaves all behind to accompany Rama into exile. He is believed to have traded sleep for a permanent state of wakefulness for the fourteen years so as to guard Rama and Sita at night. His share of sleep, by law of nature, has to be bequeathed onto another, so he passes it to his wife Urmilla. While the incident may be commonly viewed by its association to folklore or regional myths woven in to substantiate the narrative, it cannot be entirely denied that the spokes of the wheel of time have been set to turn for the fourteen years. Hence, events shall unfold that will destabilize the existing order of state, often only to reinstate



order and peace, be it in the kingdom of Kishkindha or Lanka.

As the narrative progresses, characters are either slipped into a temporary liminal existence, entering into the spaces between the spokes of the wheel, being neither here nor there: such as, Urmilla descending into a fourteen-year long sleep; Sita being ushered into the transitional state at multiple points of time in the narrative-- first standing inside the Lakshman-rekha, then being held as a captive by Ravana in Ashok Vatika, or later while stepping into fire for a trial of her purity, to even being swallowed up by the earth and eventually passing out of her human form altogether. There are other instances too like-- Ram, Lakshman and their 'vanar-sena' as they wait for the god of ocean, Varuna to make way for them to cross the ocean; Lakshman suspended in a comatose state when he lies fatally wounded in the battle and Hanuman is sent off in search of the life-giving medicine. At the same time, there are occurrences wherein the characters appear to be lulled out of their liminal state, marking an end of a certain stage of their existence and wake up to experience the sudden end of their limbo-- such as, Ahalya, who is freed from her curse; Shabari, whose rite of passage is complete when Rama finally chances upon her hut and partakes her meal; Hanuman, who is ushered out of his state of having temporarily forgotten all his powers; to many others.

While the instances of liminality and the consequent occurrence of the aforementioned liminal experiences become a recurring metaphor in the progression of the narrative in the epic, one may discover the author's creation of a pattern of experiences shared by all the characters. His tying up of these experiences as well as the being of these characters centered and created around and through Rama's three-stage liminal journey of separation, transition and eventual assimilation, showcases the intermediary role of liminality. Having begun with 'separation,' witnessed firstly from his home and parents, to later of his royal status, kingdom, and eventually even from his beloved wife; the narrative passes through 'transition,' from a prince to a forest-dweller under the guise of a saint; and finally culminates in 're-assimilation,' to the identity of a warrior and a king. The said pattern appears imperative enough not merely to be discounted as another narratological coincidence. More often than not, it appears as though an encounter, or association, or even a mere touch of Rama becomes the master ritual in each 'rite of passage,' completing the transition to a post-liminal identity and existence (or often, non-existence) for a character. This, naturally, prompts one to go back to the idea of a 'master' initiator of the ritual ceremony in a 'rite of passage' and accordingly draws parallels between the role and position served by Rama in the narrative and that of the master, head, or priest who not only initiates individuals into their transformative rite of liminality but also ushers them out of it. An idea that follows this observation is, if, at a time when re-workings of epics and mythological literature have gained popularity, with efforts being made to counter and question traditional narratives and dislodge the social, moral, and gender hierarchies within them; could liminality in its literary form-- as a device of narrative progression-- be similarly utilized to create a (non-traditional) liminal hero.

As Rama set foot in the ashrama, the curse was lifted and Ahalya stood before them in all her beauty. Having lain concealed behind leaves and

creepers and kept her vow for many years, she now shone, says the poet, in Rama's presence, like the moon emerging from the clouds, like a flame issuing from smoke and like the sun's reflection in rippling water. (Rajagopalachari, N. Pag.)

Indeed Rama, if seen as a liminal hero (neither God nor human or perhaps both) in the above episode, may shed his godly status for assuming the role of 'master' in the narrative. It will facilitate a new interpretive direction, such that playing with its fictitiousness; the epic-tale would be liberated from its religious inheritance. However, the hero would be able to achieve and sustain an almost deified and god-like stature by becoming the 'master' of rituals in the story. Moreover, quite interestingly, such exegesis would be embedded more in the stylistic aspects of a narrative design than the sheer rejection of any 'out of the world' experience of religious nature that generally invites criticism against 'alternative' interpretation of the epic tales as sacrilege. Analyzing an epic narrative through its narratological contrivances may appear more conducive to the objective treatment of numerous retellings of *Ramayana*. It allows retellings to be treated as purely artistic renderings in the light of their engagement with liminality staged as a transformative experience.

Liminality as observed in the epic narrative is not merely limited to its ritual structure. The landscape of the *Ramayana* is otherwise also populated by numerous liminal spaces and liminal beings pertaining to the Hindu mythology, and their presence, inescapably, affects or is affected by the liminality surrounding Rama's life on earth and his journey in the epic. The presence of such spaces and beings, while, adds to the liminal, transformative character of the epic, it also creates a ground for surfacing the classic contention between the often overlapping and incorrectly substituted concepts of liminality and marginality. Here, one may cite the reference to Trisanku that occurs in *Valmiki Ramayana*. The narrative introduces king Trisanku and how his aspiration to ascend to heaven in his human body leaves him suspended between the heaven and the earth. It was a quest undertaken by him, not forced, but made by own choice. C. Rajagopalachari narrates the incident in his translation:

Trisanku reached Swarga. But Indra forthwith pushed him down saying, "Who are you, entering heaven with a chandala body? You fool that earned the curse of your preceptor, go down again." Trisanku fell from heaven, head down wards, screaming, "Viswamitra! Save me!" Viswamitra, seeing this, was beside himself with rage. Determined to teach the gods a lesson, he shouted to Trisanku. "Stop there! Stop there!" and, to the amazement of all, Trisanku's earthward descent came to an abrupt stop and he stopped in mid-air, shining like a star. (Rajagopalachari, N. Pag.)

Featured as a 'frame story,' this story serves another example of liminal landscape in the *Ramayana*. A story within the story introduces sage Viswamitra, who as a part of the main narrative in *Ramayana* arrives at King Dasaratha's court and explains his purpose of visit.

Viswamitra said: "I am engaged in performing a sacrifice. As it nears completion, two powerful Rakshasas, Maricha and Subahu, defile it. They shower unclean blood and flesh on the sacred fire. Like other rishis we could curse and destroy them. But that would be a waste of all our tapas. "Our troubles will end if you send with me Rama, the eldest of your warlike sons. Under my care, he will grow in princely stature. He will surely defeat these Rakshasas and his name will gather luster. (N. Pag.)

The occurrence of such episodes in the epic tale and its later renderings in translation portend to the *Ramayana's* recurring engagements with liminality. The transitional status of the characters like Viswamitra, a kshatriya (warrior) aspiring to become a Brahma Rishi (Brahmin sage) and Trisanku, a solar dynasty king, being cursed and turned into a chandala (untouchable) indicate their 'not here not there status.' For that matter, even Rama the prince, leaves palace to accompany the sage Viswamitra in the forest for assuming the role of royal sentinel, although temporarily.

This takes us back to the cultural landscape of *Ramayana* that has characters hailing from both the upper and lower caste and class. As previously mentioned; instances of liminal transformations are present and experienced by individuals both at the margin and the center. In so doing, the accompanying reversal of hierarchy and power structure evident in the process of liminality comes into being. A case worth mentioning here is of Shabari, a lower caste female, belonging to a tribal community, and thus marginalized in multiple sense. She, who is also an ardent devotee of Rama, awaits his visit eagerly and keeps saving the choicest berries to offer him, for which she tastes and sets aside only the sweetest ones. Rama's visit and *darsan* marks the end to, and passage out of Shabari's liminal rite, but not without inducing a reversal of social hierarchies as the liminal hero Rama accepts berries that have been previously bitten by Shabari and thus rendered impure and unfit for both as an offering to and for consumption by a person from higher caste like him (ii). Similarly, in the case of Ahalya too, there seems to be a collapse of hierarchy and order (of judgement and punishments) as her penalization is reversed to salvation the moment her being comes in contact with Rama, rendering her rite of passage complete. While these characters undergo liminal transformations, the difference in their social strata arising from caste distinction cannot be overlooked definitely. However the limbo in their life, as presented in the narrative, is more characterized by the 'choice' they make or the sublimation they experience at the end of 'in between' status than an enforced obligation.

Liminality as a state of 'betweenness,' and simultaneously that of 'exclusion' and 'separation,' allows the individual to experience an alteration. However, this state of being separated and ostracized is temporary and often sought either willingly or come by inescapable circumstances, unlike the excommunication that social marginalization entails. System generated marginalization leaves individuals at the bottom of the social hierarchy, to remain stuck in that deprived place. But the characters undergoing their liminal state do not remain trapped forever as reflected in the ultimate success of their attempt in assuming

new identity. It is reflected in ultimately Viswamitra's attaining the status of Brahma Rishi as well as Ahalya's figure exuding divinity.

One may argue that here marginality blends with 'liminality' because especially these women figures, Shabri and Ahalya remain in their respective limbo until, perhaps, an outside force or *messiah* (such as, Rama, in the epic) ushers them out of it. In the first glance, this may appear problematic in the sense that it engenders a sense of complaisance with regard to the existing unequal social structure, which could be exploited by a narrator to push and sustain an individual or community to the margins and justify it as a moral, religious necessity, allowing and advocating for only a liminal, reformative movement out of it. However, the narrative depiction has a flip side also to look into, where neither the person subjected to liminality (Here, both Shabri and Ahalya) nor the outside force (here, the protagonist Rama) intervening the "not here nor there" status is bound with any social obligation. They serve as narrative agents, neither of which is defined by the sense of social contest or complaisance. On the contrary, their 'out of the world' status, both literally and metaphorically, allows them to detach from the surroundings and hierarchical setup within. They appear separating from their initial social position to move towards the destined tryst that would facilitate the ritualistic completion of a transitional phase.

The interpretative frame of liminality allows re-defining an individual's 'in between' status as a temporary stage in the process of one's transformation both at individual and community levels. It becomes a narrative device to facilitate progression instead of rendering the people and places in the everlasting 'fixed' state. The temporariness of the phase saves it from being labeled with any enforced permanent social stigma of a perpetual 'outcaste'. Moreover, the outside force incarnated as the figure of messiah, which is more of a narratological element, is re-cast as a master initiator of the ritual than a mere godly figure or a religious entity. One can easily infer the *Ramayana* as a book, which foregrounds Rama as a narrative agent. And, being the nucleus of narrative design, the central agent as the 'master', is responsible for bringing necessary change for the possible as well as desired transformation. He is deliberately made instrumental to realize its fulfillment. Therefore, Rama facilitates the end of the 'rite of passage' of other characters wedged in their respective limbo. The liminal journey of Rama is bound to traverse other corresponding liminal journeys experienced by those surrounding him. All these narratives, including both the chief storyline of Rama and the other associated sub-tales, formulate collective human experiences stowed in a community's shared understanding.

Besides, at stylistic level, as an interesting tale of human adventure, it depicts how the narrative is designed or is expected to make things happen for its own obligatory development. The 'godly' face of the master performer, here Rama, and his actions extending to the characters from different social strata, turns him into a liminal hero (iii). Moreover, by extending his liminal status to others and being instrumental in the completion of their respective limbos, he becomes the symbol of common fate applicable to all. His actions are subjected to an 'anthropological' interpretation of human engagement with various rites of passage, occurring either in natural course of life or otherwise. Liminality is experienced in different forms and people pertaining to specific culture receive

it curiously. It shapes their thought process and reflects cultural beliefs and practices. 'Rama,' in the Indian context, is an idealistic image of 'heroic,' which embraces 'transition' or liminality as a means of constructive transformation instead of being intimidated by its portended uncertainty and stagnancy. That is why the *Ramayana* assumes anthropological importance not only across regional variations in India but also across cultures in the wider range of South Asia. This epic tale epitomizes a unique narrative tradition with its peculiar literary elements in the context of Asian cultural canvass. The introduction of 'liminality' opens the scope to shift the narrative to a more 'secular' domain of art and changes the semantics by reorienting the narration towards the recurring pattern of 'intermediary' states. It is, indeed, astutely achieved through the strategic placement of events and characters in the fictional configuration of the *Ramayana*.

The narrative of *Ramayana* progresses reinforcing the idea, how human experiences consist of many limbos which are, sooner or later, bound to complete. Using the frame of liminality to analyze the *Ramayana* places the mythology and its retellings in the domain of narrative art and liberates them from overemphasized religiosity. As a result, the epic narrative is connected to the anthropological concerns of a culture and allows reviewing the liminal landscape and characters present therein as a part of cultural experiences. Mythological tales, indeed, bear unique association with human behavior and imply culturally constructed meanings. It is always an artistically construed narrative design that enables a culture to hang on the past yet germinate new semantics with the changing temporality. Indubitably, the 'change,' whether sought willingly or by chance, remains at the core of human experience. Such engagement matches the liminality of many of the life episodes and incidents experienced by a specific cultural. Hence, the epic tale of *Ramayana* does not remain confined to the religious context, but turns into an anthropological repository by its allusion to the liminal life-scape marked with numerous 'rites of passage'. It is an everlasting tale of transmuting meaning, which one could relate to, irrespective of the time frame one is located in.

### Notes

i) It is to be noted that the translated verse from *Valmiki Ramayana* describing a heightened liminal state of existence for Ahalya is given a different rendering by Tulsidas in *Ramacharitamanas*, and subsequently, in the televised version of *Ramayana* by Ramananda Sagar, wherein Ahalya is presented in the form of a stone awaiting the touch of (the dust of) Rama's feet. *Valmiki Ramayana* foregrounds the ritualistic flair of the episode by describing it more elaborately whereas the other two subsequent versions leave the character as a non-active agent (lying as an inanimate object for years). Nonetheless, the idea of Ahalya's liminal 'rite of passage' being brought to a completion by Rama's presence is sustained throughout these different renderings.

ii) The episode being referred to, however, was not originally mentioned either in Valmiki's *Ramayana* or Tulsidas's *Ramcharitamanas*. It does find a mention, first, around 300 years ago in Balarama Dasa's *Odia Dandi Ramayana*, and later, by being included in the highly popular televised series of Ramananda Sagar's 'Ramayana'. This episode of the 'tasted' berries, similar to the incident of the 'Lakshman rekha' missing from Valmiki's version but present in the form of a later reference in the *Lanka Kaanda* in Tulsidas's work, has been etched so deeply in the cultural memory of generations of audience and, gradually, trickled down into common parlance, that its inclusion in a discussion about

the narrative of the *Ramayana* seems imperative so much so that the tale of Rama would be incomplete without it. The said episode necessitates and emphasizes a key aspect of a liminal rite of passage: alteration and subversion of established hierarchies.

iii) A liminal hero is the one who lies 'in between', neither here nor there in terms of his stature as the protagonist. It determines a character's connection with the 'heroic' qualities that may sometimes appear antithetical to the concept of classical hero. So, he may appear neither all the way good nor bad, even rogue at times. However, it is to be categorically clarified here that in *Ramayana*, Rama's status as 'liminal hero' is far away from the portrayal of an antihero. He possesses god-like powers, identity and existence. Rama turns into a liminal hero since in his 'avatar' state as a mortal being on earth, he is neither all divine and omnipotent, like a god and free from human ties and sufferings, nor is he an ordinary human left powerless at the hands of fate. He is neither imperfect nor flawless (especially his action of abandoning Sita is questioned by many critics). He exhibits traits of both and becomes an 'in-between' liminal figure, the master of rituals.

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## The Mahabharata and the Indian English Novel: Negotiating Narrative Strategies in *The Palace of Illusions* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

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### Abstract

*The Mahabharata, one of India's two great epics, has become part of India's cultural inheritance occupying such a position of importance that it has prompted scholars to call the Mahabharata "the quintessence of everything that is Indian" (Sanyal 197). With such a legacy, it is hardly surprising that the Mahabharata has perennially exerted an influence over writers from all languages in India. The retellings of the epic have contributed largely to the development of critical insights into the epic, creatively modelling anew what has been known and keeping the popular interest alive. Meenakshi Mukherjee calls the episodes from the epics as "the ground on which the imagination of most Indian writers was sustained" (9). In my paper, through a case study of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*, I will be looking at how the writer has tried to fill in the "gaps and silences" (Divakaruni xiv) she felt in the epic and how the author while filling in the "silences" has given a gendered reading to the epic-story, the politics of choosing a feminine perspective and how a gendered perspective affects the narration of an age-old story.*

*Keywords: Mahabharata, novel, gender, mythology, feministic, fiction*

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### Introduction

*The Mahabharata* with its wide repository of interests touching upon history, myth, ethics, philosophy, didactics, politics, morals, and containing the whole gamut of human emotions and experience, is considered a veritable 'literary monster' that has fascinated and perpetually exerted influence on the writers of the sub-continent. A survey of the history of the Indian English literature, and literature in regional languages, will not be complete without the devotion of a considerable amount of scholarship to the retellings of *Mahabharata*. There has been no dearth of regional literature in the form of novels and poems on *Mahabharata* from the beginning of the twentieth century. Retellings often dug into the treasure trove of stories and complex psychologies offered by *Mahabharata* and experimented in interpreting them from different perspectives. The fascination with myths, the "agents of stability" (Kermode 39), the enduring and eternal store-house of tales on human nature was of course an inspiration and challenge to writers.

In this essay Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* will be taken as a case study to see how the epic story has been re-narrated. In *The Palace of Illusions*, Divakaruni has diverged from the traditional method of narrating the epic. She has left the story-within-a-story omniscient multiple narratives, and has chosen one particular person



from the sea of characters to narrate the story i.e Draupadi. In the beginning of the novel we encounter a teenage Draupadi, who in her father Drupad's palace is obsessed with her own beginning- a girl who asks for a story, 'the story of my birth' (Divakaruni 1). From the outset, Divakaruni plays with the motif of stories and the power that stories have in shaping the life of an individual. Through the character of Dhai Maa, her nurse and life-long confidante, Draupadi becomes aware of Drupad's and Drona's misunderstandings and a humiliated Drupad's wish for a son who will avenge him, "Were the stories we told each other true? Who knows? At the best of times a story is a slippery thing. Certainly no one had told us this particular one, though it was the tale we most needed to know" (Divakaruni 15). Though apparently, here Draupadi is talking about a particular story pertaining to Drupad and Drona's past, it seems as if the protagonist is a mouth-piece of the author herself who seems to be validating a re-telling. Stories gain power with each telling; they simmer and change, become newer and more powerful and change meanings in the hands of a skilled narrator. And through this subjective narrative position, she has attempted to preserve the essence of the epic-story while at the same time containing it in a completely alien vessel of the 'novel' format. The subjective narrative technique that Divakaruni adopts is time and again interspersed with switches in the narrative perspective in the form of incorporation of dreams and stories told by others. Even while talking of mythical and mystical births, Divakaruni attempts to bring a shot of realism to the tale, when the cranky Dhai Maa, responds to Draupadi's question as to whether the voices really did say that, "That's what the priests claimed. Who can tell for sure? You know how sounds boom and echo in that hall" (Divakaruni 5). This switching of perspectives gives a greater breadth and vision to the novel which would have been otherwise reduced to a mere summarized narration from a single character's point of view and fallen into the trap of just another novel attempting to read a traditionally Indian form of story-telling in a western way without the richness of its multiple insights and diversions.

As mentioned, Divakaruni has singled out the character of Draupadi to narrate the tale. The success of any re-telling of the *Mahabharata* would up to a point depend upon the perspective from which the author decides to narrate the work. But here in the novel as I have already mentioned, Divakaruni has preferred a single perspective to that of multiple ones as in the epic *Mahabharata*. The politics of choosing Draupadi in Divakaruni's case is pretty evident; she wanted if not a feminist, at least a female reading of the events. In her introduction to the novel, Divakaruni lists one of her motives or rather an impetus to write the novel when she says that whenever she heard stories from *Mahabharata* in her childhood she was always:

left unsatisfied with the portrayal of women.... But in some way, they remained shadowy figures, their thoughts and motives mysterious, their emotions portrayed only when it affected the lives of the male heroes, their roles ultimately subservient to those of their fathers or husbands, brothers or sons.... If I ever wrote a book...I would place the women in the forefront of the action. I would uncover the story that lay invisible between the lines of men's exploits (Divakaruni xiv).

This quest for the "female truth" (Beauvoir), to re-tell and re-present things in a

uniquely female way, imparts a grand ambition to the retelling of an epic which uniquely stands with its strong female characters who exist in socio-political structures marred by unequal gender relations. Thus, Divakaruni's Draupadi becomes more than a heroine from the epic: she becomes invested with the problems and situations a woman has to face and deals with some pertinent and persistent questions which a woman in a patriarchal society faces even now. As a heroine who accompanies and braves all the mishaps and hardships that her husbands had to face, and who had such a great say in the scheme of things, she is indeed one of the unique creations of literature.

From the very beginning, Divakaruni's Draupadi "hungered to know about the amazing, mysterious world that extended past" (Divakaruni 23) beyond the restrictive limits placed on her by society. Draupadi of the epic, as well as the novel, does not passively inhabit the structure of a patriarchal society where the males fight for power. Instead, she actively intervenes, questions, and at times, though ineffectively, resists the injustices meted out to the women folk. The woman's *Mahabharata* takes a promising turn in the beginning when an angry Draupadi, frustrated with the limiting roles a woman has to play in society, lashes out:

And who decided that a woman's highest purpose was to support men?" I burst out as soon as we were alone. "A man, I would wager! Myself, I plan on doing other things with my life".... And why was a battle necessary at all? Surely there were other ways to glory, even for men? I'd teach them to search for those (Divakaruni 26).

A Draupadi who rooted for different value systems than the one she was enmeshed in, almost gives fresh hope to the readers. Draupadi's unique position, that of an 'outsider' by virtue of her gender and thus able to see things differently, gives a fresh perspective to the novel. Being outside yet situated inside the same patriarchal society gives her the unique vantage point of being able to look at institutions of power of the time, like Kingship, war, and others, differently and offers critical insight. Her constant commentary on all the major events of the epic gives us fresh insights into the story.

We have already discussed Divakaruni's politics of giving a feminist interpretation of the epic. However, what is also pertinent here is how she has thrown into sharp focus incidents from the epic that are crucial to her central character and looked at them from a critical point of view. Ian Watt has said about the epic that we move from a classical age with a social orientation to the age of the novel, with an individualistic and psychological orientation. And it is this psychological and individualistic orientation that we see informing the commentary of the epic. Draupadi at times becomes a woman with modern psyche caught in the epic time. The magnanimous frame of the epic is divested for the narrower form of bildungsroman or coming-of-the age story of Draupadi, as in the novel she matures from a state of innocence to a state of experience. The form of the novel thus gives Divakaruni a way to negotiate the past and present, the past with its epic setting and the present with the heroine having a psyche rooted to the reality of modern life. Christiane Seydou defines the outcome of the epic as follows,

The outcome of the epic is to mould a common collective knowledge (narrated story generally known to all), carrier of ideological values of the group, in a form capable of "dynamizing" this knowledge by exciting the audience, by its communion in the exaltation, conscience, the conscience of its distinct identity and the aspiration to achieve this identity (50).

The novel clearly does not do this function, but there is narrowing down of the epic proportions to talk about the story of one person.

On the other hand, the novel does succeed in highlighting incidents strategically important and pertaining to the central character, thus throwing other characters into greater relief for the readers. In this context, it will be useful to look into one of the main incidents narrated by the author. One of the most defining moments in the *Mahabharata* is Draupadi's disrobing and her questioning the validity of Yudhishthira staking her when he himself was lost in the game of dice. Hildebeitel observes, "Draupadi's question unsettles the authorities, and brings forth higher authority where it is silenced or absent, and opens the question of authority to multiple voices, including her own and the poets'. The *sabha* is the epic's ultimate setting for constructing, deconstructing and rethinking authority" (Hildebeitel 240). Divakaruni deals this scene with much skill, Draupadi who is no unlettered girl, orders Duryodhan's servant to go back to the court and ask him if Yudhishthira had any right at all to wager his wife when he had lost himself. Up to the moment Draupadi's voice (question) is raised, everyone including Duryodhana is surprised. As Mehendale says, everyone assumed "that Draupadi had lost her status as a free woman. But now for the first time (they) realize that Draupadi does not agree to this position... He (Duryodhana) tacitly admits that her question is justified" (Mehendale 185). Divakaruni skips over the nitty gritty and goes straight to the main sequence of events with Dushasana barging in and dragging Draupadi to the *sabha*. There in the court humiliated and abused in front of everyone, for the first time Draupadi's ambiguities about Karna disappear as he waited for her to fall on her knees and beg for mercy. Together with it, her confidence in the 'sabha', that the 'sabha' which constitutes of great men like Bheeshma, Drona and so on, would come to her rescue also disappears. Draupadi has to let go of her resistance and surrender unconditionally to Krishna to escape from the dire dishonor done to her. This episode serves to teach her one of her greatest lessons in life, from both her enemies and her own. From Karna's refusal to help her, she learns that the desire for vengeance is stronger than any longing to be loved. Her absolute belief in the power of her five husbands, is also shattered. She had unquestionably believed that her husbands loved her to the point that they would do anything for her. But now a greater realization dawns upon her:

Though they did love me – as much perhaps as any man can love – there were other things they loved more. Their notions of honor, of loyalty toward each other, of reputation were more important to them than my suffering. They would avenge me later, yes, but only when they felt the circumstances would bring them heroic fame. A woman doesn't think that way. I would have thrown myself forward to save them if it had been in my power that day (Divakaruni 195).

Draupadi realizes at this juncture that she would have to guard herself from hurt as much from her enemies as from her loved ones. Rather than putting the entire blame on the men folk, Draupadi also realizes that, in the end, a woman is no better than a man when it came down to revenge. Her uncombed, unkempt long hair which she vows not to tie till “the day I bathe it in Kaurava blood” (Divakaruni 194) bears testimony to the fact. The episode is of central importance for the fact that, at this juncture, Draupadi takes agency of her own body. She decides what to do with it, than mould it as a 'thing of delight to the eyes' of the patriarchal society who wants to see it that way. Her long beautiful hair, which had been much extolled at the time of her birth, and throughout the epic, transgresses from a thing of beauty to something that would fill with dread the heart of everyone who sees it. It becomes an object waiting to be satiated in the blood of vengeance. Here Draupadi is trading her much famed beauty for a burning vengeance.

For Divakaruni's Draupadi, the dicing hall episode becomes a catharsis of sorts. She had emerged from it suffering humiliation to the extent no woman had suffered before and yet chastised of her high expectations from her husbands. The girl had died and in her place a woman with a desire vengeance was born. It would not be stretching the argument too far, to say that the moment Draupadi vowed to bathe her tresses in blood, she had transgressed some part of her femininity like her sister Shikhandi. While Amba/ Shikhandi had to travel all the way to transcend her gender for the fulfillment of her revenge, here Draupadi too sacrifices some parts of her femininity to attain her revenge. Draupadi decides to follow her husbands to their exile, here she is sacrificing her duties as a mother to be with her husbands, to be a constant reminder to them lest they forget in the fourteen long years that vengeance should be exacted to the last drop. Incidentally, Divakaruni had taken special pains to sketch the Shikhandi-Draupadi sisterhood. Right from her curiosity to see “a woman who was a dangerous warrior” (Divakaruni 44) and at the curious reassurance she felt at the similarity of their destinies, there was a bonding between the two characters. Quite prophetically, it is Shikhandi who while recounting her past life, first tells Draupadi that since all men failed her she “determined to do on my own what no man dared do for me... Wait for a man to avenge your honor and you will wait forever” (Divakaruni 49). Andrea Custodi in her essay notes what Doniger and Goldman had said, “there is a dark, destructive lethal undercurrent to Shikhandi's female-to-male transsexuality” (qtd in Brodbeck and Black 220) with its goal ultimately lying in vengeance/destruction. In Divakaruni's Draupadi we see the same “destructive undertones” although her character “never switches genders but does challenge the epic's explicit dharmic formulations of what a woman and wife should be” (Brodbeck and Black 220).

## Conclusion

Retellings always add something new to the *Mahabharata* canon. At the end of the day, Draupadi becomes just another pawn in the patriarchal universe she is a part of. And the fact that Divakaruni had set out to only “fill the silences” hints that in the world Draupadi inhabited, female agency had no place. But the success of the novel lies in the fact that within the codes of the patriarchal society, Divakaruni's Draupadi attempts to find a voice of her own. The confines of the established epic-storyline does not give the author much elasticity and for this reason Draupadi can only comment on her situation and muse

about the injustices of the gender equation. As Julia Hoydis says, “one needs to read the text as an addition, rather than as an alternative version of the original, as a re-writing which complements a picture without claiming comprehensiveness” (7).

*The Palace of Illusions* succeeds in so far as to present a feminine interpretation of the story, and lays open the myriad possibilities inherent in the silences of the text. Divakaruni does not raise her novel to epic proportions but the success of the novel lies in the fact that it does indeed carve a niche in the retelling saga for her own work by giving it a gendered retelling.

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## The Poetics of Exile: A Study of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams*

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### *Abstract*

*The evolution of the diasporic sensibility in terms of its continually changing consciousness needs to be recognized, and the role of subsequent generations of migrants is central to this debate. The complexities of distinctive identity of these generations, also known as 'hidden generations,' require particular note as they indicate both the challenges to and possibilities for successful integration in the host community. They suffer from double marginalization, first because of their ethnicity and secondly due to generational differences. They become a minority within a minority in the multiethnic, multicultural world of the West. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's fiction discusses the evolving nature of both immigrant and mainstream American cultural establishment by depicting, with sensitivity and discernment, the lives of the second-generation migrants. She offers the synthesis of oriental ethics with the occidental ethos. Divakaruni employs magic realism to explore the evolution of the diasporic sensibility in terms of its continually changing consciousness. Magic realism plays a crucial role in providing an outlet to the innermost desires, hopes and aspirations by allowing a flight of fantasy and providing a forum unrestrained by logic of reason and reality. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel, *Queen of Dreams*, explores displacement, rootlessness, fragmentation, marginalization and crisis in identity of the expatriates, particularly their descendents through the medium of magic realism. This paper intends to negotiate how through a work of magic realism, *Queen of Dreams*, these issues are explored and a cross-cultural synthesis is achieved.*

*Keywords: Diaspora, Magic-realism, marginalization, 9/11, nostalgia, identity.*

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The term 'diaspora' is derived from an ancient Greek word meaning "to scatter about. Though term 'diaspora' which was initially used in connection with the exile of the Jews from their homeland Palestine, is now being used to include all types of immigrants and their migration, whether forced or voluntary from their homelands to other transnational lands as well as within the nation. In order to understand its changing implications with the passage of time, it is necessary to discuss the views presented by different scholars and theorists in this field. Throwing light on the concept of diaspora, William Safran in his essay "Diaspora in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return" pertinently observes that only that group can be called a 'diaspora' in which there is a dispersal of people "from an original center" to "two or more foreign regions" and who keep on maintaining a "collective memory, vision or myth about their original homeland" (qtd. in Vertovac 7). He further asserts in "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return" identifies six features of the diaspora namely dispersal, collective memory,

alienation, respect and longing for the homeland, a belief in its restoration, and a self-definition with this homeland (Safran, 83-99).. Lewellen points out “the most agreed upon aspect of diaspora is the emotional relationship to some sort of homeland” (166). He further points out that “diaspora provides a more intense sense of identity and often of purpose in life than may be the case for the typical citizen” (167). These features known as forerunners of the concept of diaspora have been modified by Robin Cohen, who with the intention to move away from the definitions based on the paradigm of Jewish experiences, stresses that possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism” can also be one of the common features of the concept of diaspora (Global Diasporas 26). Khachig Tololyan in his essay “Rethinking Diaspora: Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment” states that one's continuous practice and one's development of “diasporic consciousness” makes a person “diasporan” (30). Adding to the idea of “diasporic consciousness,” Robin Cohen avers that “[a] strong tie to the past or a block to assimilation in the present and future must exist in order to permit a diasporic consciousness to emerge or to be retained” (Global Diasporas 24). This diasporic consciousness can instigate a strong desire in the minds of diasporas either for assimilation into new environments or for resistance to do so. It is also said, “Each such diaspora is an interweaving of multiple travelling; a text of many distinctive and, perhaps, even disparate narratives” (Brah, *Cartographies* 180). In fact, the genre of diaspora studies has evolved with scholars such as Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall and James Clifford playing key roles in fostering it.

The Indian diaspora that has its own spatio-temporal dimensions just like any other diaspora, refers to the people of Indian origin who have migrated to foreign lands from the territories that comprise the Indian republic. This standard term also includes the descendants of these expatriates under its ambit. .Being the largest diaspora in the world, it has a significant global presence along with a history that dates back to the Buddhist era or even further back to the time of the Indus Valley civilisation. The new diaspora is the diaspora of globalisation and mobility. Its members live in two worlds simultaneously. Consisting of members who lead hyphenated lives, this diaspora makes its presence felt in the world. It is hyphenated as the self is not identified with any of the two nations in absolute – homeland and adopted. It is a part of multiculturalism taking nourishment from both the adopted as well as the native land. Mishra points out that the new Indian diaspora “incorporated India into its bordered, de-territorialised experiences within Western nation-states” (Mishra “The Diasporic Imaginary,” 434).

The Indian diaspora is providing an empowered space that produces significant narratives which discuss the question of American and South Asian identity. Many anthologies featuring fresh or familiar voices try to define the contours of South Asian societies that have settled in America. This nearly invisible minority is making its mark in the literary circles. Contemporary South Asian authors are now challenging and contesting the imposed invisibility. As a significant writer of Indian diaspora, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni excels at depicting the nuances of immigrant experience and she writes to shatter preconceived stereotypical myths regarding immigrant population. Divakaruni, an

award-winning author, poet and teacher was born in Kolkata, India, and migrated to the U.S.A. She has won many awards including the prestigious American Book Award, Pen Oakland/ Josephine Miles Literary Award and the Pushcart Prize. Her experiences as an immigrant writer have provided her with a versatile identity and the opportunity to describe the past and present through regular engagement with both cultures. Her characters show significant resilience to dislocation. In the face of challenges they reconcile, re-affiliate and renegotiate their identities. The philosophy that her writings reflect is Janus-faced. It is not so much about going back to the roots as it's about coming to terms with them and the new culture. Her novels explore the dynamic life of the various Indo-American characters and their final transmutation to a remixed imagination of their own. This is where Indian and American cultures converge and merge.

For presenting her themes, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni employs various techniques, images and metaphors. Magic realism is one of the important techniques employed by her. Magic and real world cross roads and cohabit with each other in her plots. Mutually contradictory factors like life and death, waking and dreaming, mind and body come together and the boundaries of realism are expanded. The matter-of-fact inclusion of fantastic and mythical elements into seemingly realistic fiction in *Queen of Dreams* gives depth to the diasporic milieu of the plot. It gives expression to itinerant existence of Rakhi, the protagonist, as well as other immigrants. While delineating the common occurrences of the Indian diasporic community, *Queen of Dreams* integrates an Indian-American experience with magic realism. Fables of Indian kings and visions add to the book's effectiveness. It gives an almost other-worldly feel to the story. The intangible mystery exudes magical fragrance in the aura of the novel with snake emissaries, dream caves, the guardian angels and a book called the Brihat Swapna Sarita. Divakaruni has explored the realm of magic through the mystical dreams. She has used the metaphor of dreams to explore the concepts of alienation, nostalgia, assimilation, rootlessness, hybridity and cultural dichotomy. It is used to capture dramatic tension. It suggests depths without emphatic statement. Divakaruni lends extraordinary charm to the ordinary by taking the reader through magical world of dreams. It helps her condense experiences and heightens select moments, imbuing them with emotion. Dreams are used as a medium that represent the predicament of first generation of immigrants longing for home, second generation's cultural dilemma, pull of both the cultures and the synthesis of both. Dreams are the expression of the unconscious. They are the manifestations of our deepest desires, expression of the innermost feelings and an outpouring of the soul. They mirror and reflect human emotions. The eponymous dreams of Rakhi's mother, found in her dream journals, add intricacy to the narrative structure and give a heavy dose of mysticism.

The first generation of immigrants reacted individualistically to immigration, especially while raising their offspring in a contentious host culture. Mrs. Gupta, Rakhi's mother, never came to accept her migration to California. She is just caught up in America. Her lost ability to dream is regained temporarily only by a handful of earth from homeland. She aches for her homeland. "I knew how much my link with the dream spirits meant. I could not give it up" (Divakaruni, *Queen* 178). She even plans unsuccessfully to leave her husband behind and run back to her land of dreams but her unplanned pregnancy shatters



that hope as well. She is just like other first generation migrants who desperately want to go back to the land of their origin but are caught in the alien land because of their families. She nurtures in her heart “her longing for community forever” (211). But her approach is quite contrary while bringing up Rakhi. She gives her “a warped Western sense of what's Indian?” (89) because she believes that not talking about the past will protect her daughter. That way, she “wouldn't be constantly looking back, hankering, like so many immigrants do....,splitting (you) between here and there, between (your) life right now and that which can never be” (89). On the contrary, the parents of Belle and Jespal try their best to bring them up in accordance with Indian mores and codes.

Immigrants' identity could be plural or partial. This symbolizes cultural multiplicity when it is plural while partial stands for fragile cultural roots. But the diasporic writers advocate plural, hybrid identity as panacea for all the ills. The second generation of Asian-Americans, a relatively new cross-cultural breed of Indians living in America, have emerged as a section of society that is neither exclusively American nor Indian, but has the traits of both. The diagonally conflicting influence of both communities produces a cultural ambiguity. They suffer from a conflict between their native identity and the acquired one. They have evolved a new and meaningful version of consolidated values while cutting themselves off from the biological homeland.

Rakhi, the second generation Asian-American, longs for India's mystical charm. She is always denied any contact with India by her mother. Dream World delineates Rakhi's journey of life. Her life's rhythm is attuned to this desire and effectively brings out her eternal dilemma. Initially, she desperately desire to be a part of her mother's dream realm, her Indian identity but her experience with the dream world proves so catastrophic that her mother makes a “botched” (Divakaruni, *Queen* 52) attempt to buy that dream from her for a dollar and as a result dooms her to a dreamless existence. Her antithetical reminiscence of Sonny's session of fusion music also suggests her inability to deal with her hybrid existence. She has an aggressive desire to learn to be the interpreter of dreams like her mother because she feels “to be an interpreter of the inner realm seemed so *Indian*” (35). She craves for “all things Indian” (35) and disposes of Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* because it “focused too much on Western methodology” (49). Rakhi exoticises the East like a Westerner. In her student days she, in an attempt to be acquainted with her origin, borrows cassettes with songs about Bengali monsoons and listens to them time and again. But only when “ancient Indian wisdom and New Age Californian” (48) come together that Rakhi is complete.

The charisma of the man in white and Elaina, the girl in flowery dress, weaves fantasy and reality so beautifully that magic seamlessly flows into the waves of the reality. In addition to imparting the magical ambiance to the plot, they discuss the relevant issues very effectively. Man in white, messenger of the dream world for Rakhi's mother and later Rakhi's guardian angel, is essentially Orient in origin. He seems to connote everything that's lost in leaving the motherland. While he symbolises a feeling of loss for Rakhi's mother and offers her ultimate redemption by taking her down the path back to dream world, a land she is denied when she abandoned her motherland, he proves metaphorically claustrophobic for young Rakhi who desperately wants to know the of her mother's native land and feels

lost. He is the dream power that is not hers but he plays a pivotal role in Rakhi's life. He reignites the blocked virtuoso of Rakhi by appearing to her consistently in the eucalyptus woods. He helps Rakhi to come to terms and embrace her status as Indian-American by delivering the photographs that uncloud her mind. The photographs that are "Indian- but in such different ways!" (Divakaruni, *Queen* 245) teach her to shed the boundaries around the word 'Indian'. With these conventional icons falling apart, "she waits to see if she can build new satisfying shapes from them" (245). She also wonders about the man in white if he appears to her, "to bring her something old, something new, a crumb of memory, a sliver of understanding?" (144) to give her a glimpse of dream world to help her to symphonize her synthesized cultural identity. Her efforts to paint the tree in the eucalyptus grove are thwarted time and again until she comes to terms with her hybrid existence. Only when India and America come equidistant to meet in her life, her identity is complete.

The amalgamation comes quite naturally for the third generation immigrant, Jonaki, Her metaphorically inheriting her grandmother's gift of dream-telling and her mother expressing herself through painting stands for her being perfectly at peace with her Indian origin and American upbringing. She is the true blue transnational human being whose guardian angel is not some elusive oriental man in white but a Czechoslovakia girl in floral dress with flowers in her hair, Eliana, a friendly dream spirit, who pampers her with gifts and guides her in every possible way. Whereas the elders in the caves and Rakhi's mother were apprehensive of losing the gift of dreaming in the alien lands, Joana is perfectly at peace with it. She anticipates the fire in the kitchen, the 9/11 twin tower attacks and has constant association with her dead grandmother. Her acceptance of her dichotomized cultural identity makes her mystical blessings also inclusive.

Another aspect of ABCDs (American- Born Confused Desis) is portrayed through Balwant aka Belle, who is very keen "to shed the last vestiges of her desi-ness" (Divakaruni 15). Quite like Rakhi, she is culturally confused but she rejects every attempt made by her parents to "let them pull her back into their safe Sikh net" (Divakaruni 16). She hates the idea that she was sent in her childhood to take up Punjabi classes at a gurudwara. This peppy, semi-Bimbo girl makes every effort to break away from her FOB (fresh off boat) rules of her Sikh parents that they "pushed down (her) throat everyday of (her) life until she escaped to the college" (Divakaruni 219) but unconsciously and ironically, she idolizes and wholeheartedly affirms magical powers of Rakhi's mother and Indian system of Zodiac signs. On the other hand, her boyfriend Jespal is a very balanced character who, after careful considerations, embraced his ethnic identity and embraced his parents' faith and lifestyle. "He didn't accept them because he grew up with them. He thought about them and struggled against them, but finally he was convinced they fitted better than Western ways." (Divakaruni 219)

The group of musicians that comes to 'the cha shop' every evening belongs to the category of the first generation immigrants who strive to recreate 'home' in the adopted country. They gather there, as Rakhi's mother had prophesied, to satisfy "a need in them that's deep and real" (Divakaruni 48). They get together every evening to venerate and revive the nation's memory via music. Desi music, being emblematic of their cultural uniqueness, is the tangible tie with the lost homelands for a couple of hours. They are busy singing, dancing and playing on instruments. It is not a performance but a mode of cultural affirmation, a ceremony – a ceremony of commemoration of homeland spirit.

The aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attack raises the question of Asian-Americans' hyphenated identities. Rakhi, her family and friends are assailed by the native people, who call themselves 'patriots', in the Kurma shop. Besides the physical injuries, it causes serious doubts about the acceptance of migrants by the United States. Though the messenger from the dream world again appears to save them but the words of the rioters, "You ain't no American" (Divakaruni 267), keep on haunting Rakhi, who wonders "if I wasn't American, then what was I?" (Divakaruni 267) India becomes little more than a myth in the shocked aftermath of the terrorist attack. It becomes a lived reality, the formative dimension of their past and present lives.

Rakhi finds her redemption in her encounter with the material manifestation of 'Dream Time' in the form of Elaine during the concert of the hybrid music for this hybrid horde of second generation of immigrants, "a déjà vu of cultural memory" (Divakaruni 303). Her face to face confrontation with Elaine proves to be a panacea for all her doubts and confusions and restores her peace of mind and marital harmony. But for that she has to move from the periphery into the centre of cultural transmutation and cultural hybridity. She has to adopt and immerse herself in it. She has to become a part of that culture to be at peace with herself and the mystical mysteries of her daughter and her dead mother.

Divakaruni's fiction ventures into the cultural space of immigrant experience along with their history, myth and diversity. The dominant strains of tension in her literary works arise from a perceived conflict between the host and the native cultures. The tales of dislocation and relocation articulate the anguish at displacement, the anxiety of maintaining family traditions/ native cultural norms in an alien land, the resultant feeling of homelessness, gaining confidence in the process and defining the new concept of 'home.' Her fiction provides a better purview of the dynamics of women's relocation in various circumstances, emblematic of the migrant women's situation and psyche. Through the medium of magic realism, Divakaruni has presented the cultural confusion that is resolved only when India and America come equidistant to integrate. The migrants have to become a part of the cultural cauldron to be at peace with themselves and the mystical mysteries of the cultures.

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## Reinventing Self-identity: The Rugged Path of Diaspora in the Poetry of Meena Alexander

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### Abstract

Meena Alexander is one of the major transcultural, transnational diasporic poets. Born in India and later a resident in Sudan, England and United States, her identity is marked by multiplicity, a sense of rootlessness and alienation. Nostalgia for the much coveted homeland is woven in her works. All her works are profoundly influenced by the numerous ways in which she has experienced mobility, displacement and relocation and the multiple ways in which she has continuously negotiated complex intersections of cultures, languages, race, gender and history. Her perpetual search for home and her painful awareness of the impossibility of claiming any stable, single, fixed home; marks her writing with a diasporic angst that embodies the trauma of dislocation and fragmentation. She expresses her first hand experiences of how one encounters and suffers split identity. This paper explores themes of migration, exile, multiple identities and allegiances introduced in her poems.

Keywords: Diaspora, identity crisis, culture, alienation.

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As one of the most accomplished writers of Postcolonial India, Meena Alexander (1951-2018) always remained as a genuine voice of the diasporic community. Unlike many of the writers of Indian diaspora who mainly focused on prose fictions, Alexander primarily gave importance to lyrics. Meena Alexander was born as Mary Elizabeth Alexander in Allahabad, raised in Kerala and Khartoum, educated in Sudan and Britain and settled in New York with her family. As she had a split identity, her works deal with issues of identity formation and retention. Her works have been translated into several languages and widely anthologised. Alexander's poetry collection, *Illiterate Heart* (2002) won the PEN Open Book Award and her memoir, *Fault Lines* (1993), was chosen as one of *Publishers Weekly's* Best Books of 1993.

Alexander encountered problems relevant to both Indian writing in English and postcolonial writing as she was a poet of South Kerala and an Asian immigrant in America. Her poetry and fiction are born out of this multiplicity, and it is the product of the tension resulting from the variety of environments in which she has lived. In her memoir *Fault Lines*, she portrayed herself as "a woman cracked by multiple migrations, uprooted so many times (who could) connect nothing with nothing" (3). Her diasporic consciousness and multiple dislocations which resulted from multiple cultures has transformed her into "many souls, many voices in one dark body" (2). Alexander in *The Shock of Arrival* elaborates Du Bois's

concept of 'double consciousness' when she explains her creative process, "It is from the consciousness of unselfing that I create my work" (128). This consciousness reflects itself literally in Alexander's hyphenated identities, "everything that comes to me is hyphenated: a woman-poet, a woman-poet-of-color, a south Indian woman-poet-of-color" (127).

Alexander redefined herself in her journey as a poet. She was born in a Malayali Christian family as Mary, and later changed her name officially to Meena which created for her a feeling of liberation from the colonial clutches. She asserts in her memoir *Fault Lines* that, "I felt I had changed my name to what I already was, some truer self, stripped free of the colonial burden" (74). She was exposed to multiple languages due to her regular displacements from one place to another, but the swift migrations prevented her from mastering any one of them. Therefore, under compulsion, she takes resort to "the canonical burden of British English" in which "her unspoken sense of femaleness played a great part" (112). The theme of belongingness is one of the key elements of diasporic discourses. The continuous change in place of living affects the physical and mental psyche of a person living in diaspora. The immigrants ever tried to adjust with the host society by making a compromise with their own indigenous culture but in the host country they will be subordinated as the 'other'. Standing at the midst of confusion about where they belong, the immigrants will develop their own strategies to survive. For Alexander, "The voice tricks itself. History is maquillage. No homeland here" (193).

Her poetry is her endless search for a fixed identity and also for her roots. A conflict between memory and present experiences underlies her works which remains as a complex intertwinement of the Indian and immigrant experiences. Alexander's poems with their intense lyricism convey the broken experience of the traveller, for whom home is both everywhere and nowhere. She draws imagery from varied migrated cultural landscapes: childhood in Tiruvalla, Allahabad and Pune, and adolescence in Khartoum and adulthood in Nottingham, Delhi, Hyderabad, and Manhattan. Most of her writing explore themes like migration, displacement, rootlessness, exile and multiple identities. Some of these themes are introduced in her early works of poetry - *The Bird's Bright Wing* (1976), *Without Place* (1978), *I root my Name* (1977) and *Stone Roots* (1980). These themes continue to appear in her subsequent works too. As the title of many of her books reveal, her major preoccupation is the reason for roots through evocation of local landscapes, events, persons, family members and events. In her later collections of poems, she deals with the issues of defining the strength of female self especially through matrilineal memories. Her memories are filled with the thoughts of her grandfather Ilya, her grandmother and their house in Tiruvella. Ilya was a sort of intelligent social reformer who was quite close to E.M.S. Nambudripad. Her grandmother Kunju was a highly educated Christian who followed Gandhian values. She was a liberal minded woman who worked for women's liberation through education. Multiple migrations in Alexander's life have resulted in a poetic vocabulary that is a palimpsest of various languages. In her childhood it was a burden for her to learn English, colonial language, but in later years she had fused it with the rhythms of her mother tongue Malayalam like a creative artist.

Meena Alexander has of the view that the idea of diaspora is related to one's

ethnicity i.e, culture and race. She defines ethnicity in her memoir *Fault Lines* as follows:

Ethnicity for such as I am comes into being as pressure, a violence from within that resists some fracturing....It rests on the unknown that seizes you from behind, in darkness. In place of hierarchy and authority and decorum that I learnt as an Indian woman, in place of purity and pollution; right hand for this, left hand for that, we have an ethnicity that breeds in the perpetual present, that will never be wholly spelt out. (202)

*The House of a Thousand Doors* (1988) is a collection of powerful poems and prose pieces that underline the figure of the 'grandmother' as an anchor to the migrant sensibility of dislocation and loss of identity. Alexander discovers her fractured self through her female ancestors. She tries to connect with her very own roots through the description of her maternal grandmother and her house in Tiruvella through the poem *The House of a Thousand Doors*:

This house has a thousand doors  
the sills are cut in bronze  
.....  
at twilight  
as the sun burns down to the Kerala coast.  
The roof is tiled in red  
.....  
In dreams  
waves lilt, a silken fan  
in grandmother's hands  
shell colored, utterly bare  
as the light takes her.  
She kneels at each  
of the thousand doors in turn  
paying her dues.  
Her debt is endless. (1-2, 7-9, 13-21)

The collection *River and Bridge* (1996) describes her political and personal experiences. It contains poems that express nostalgia for homeland, memories of childhood and also monotonous life of a migrant in the USA. Alexander's diasporic consciousness longs to harmonize the past and the present and move towards progress. According to Alexander poetry acts as the source of reconciliation that synchronizes the past and present and encourages us to proceed in order to bring forth a positive change. Thus Alexander in *River and Bridge* observes that the idea of birth is accepted and a new identity is won with difficulty in the case of rebirth. A new life – choice from a rebirth of identity is projected in hopeful, positive terms in these lines from the same poem:

I have come to the Hudson's edge to begin my life  
to be born again, to seep as water might  
in a landscape of mist, burnished trees,  
a bridge the seizes crossing.

.....  
 criss- cross red lights, metal implements,  
 battlefields: birth is always bloody. (6-9, 12-13)

The allusions to "Homer" and "Vyasa" bring to mind a segment of ancient history of violence, migration and exile where Alexander's experience is seen against its backdrop. This affinity between two ancient epics; Odyssey of the Greek Homer and Mahabharata of the Indian Vyasa, on the one side, and the plight of Alexander's female personas, on the other, narrates the ordeal of shifting identities caught in the labyrinth of diaspora.

Boundaries get blurred when one swings between two worlds. Alexander feels a sense of non-belongingness everywhere she went. The idea of 'no man's land' can be seen in her long poem *Night- Scene, The Garden* (1992):

My back against barbed wire  
 snagged and coiled to belly height  
 on granite posts  
 glittering to the moon  
 No man's land  
 No women's either  
 I stand in the middle  
 of my life.  
 out of earth's soft  
 and turbulent core  
 a drum sounds  
 summoning ancestors  
 They rise  
 through puffs of grayish dirt  
 scabbed skins slit  
 and drop from them  
 They dance  
 a top the broken spurts  
 of stone  
 They scuff  
 the drum skins  
 with their flight heels.(1-22)

The poem *Migrant Memory* from the collection *Birthplace with Buried Stones* shows the nostalgic feelings and experiences of Alexander. She remembers her native culture and practices. Her journey of life makes an identity with native memory and foreign memory. Through her poetic creation, she mixes up her past and present emotions. Alexander goes back to her past time which is, according to her, very important for literary creations. So, the past facts and traditional cultures are the recurrent theme of her poetry:

I try to remember a desert town,  
 Mirages at noon, at dusk at dusty lawn  
 Bottles of gin and scotch, a mathematician



To whom I spoke of reading Proust all summer long.  
 His mistress stood on tiptoe wiping his brow with her pent up silk,  
 Her sari, hot green rivaling the neem leaves. (1-6)

*Raw Silk* depicts the aftermath of 9/11 with reference to immigrant situation. The poem *Blue Lotus* depicts the sorrow caused by the exile and dislocation of mothers. The poet is in search of a stone, a shelter, a hovel of straw, or even a sperm out of which the life of man and woman begins. For that, she climbs the mountains and clears them just to find, "the sign of four-cornered world, gammadion, / which stands for migration, for the scattering / of the people. The desolation of mothers" (42). She introduces a female persona who may be the poet herself involved in a journey into the past that unravels with the landscapes of ancestors and homelands, "Monsoon clouds from the shore/ near my grandmother's house/ float through my lines" (52-54). The relation between the moment of 'in-between' of memory and the act of writing is important. The poem conveys a painful sense of nostalgia and a quest for belonging to an imaginary homeland. The "Monsoon" rains and sparkling "shores," in the stanza captures beauty of India and equates the female persona with her ethnic identification. The strong hidden feelings of unbelongingness develop more deeply in the following stanza than the previous one:

Twilight, I stroll through stubble fields  
 clouds lift, the hope of a mountain.  
 What was distinct turns to mist,  
 what was fitful burns the heart,  
 When I dream of my tribe gathering  
 by the red soil of the Pamba River. (1-6)

The stanza mixes different emotions and it leads to confusing ones, as the female figure enters the space of memory where her split subjectivities mingle between "twilight," "hope," red soil," "tribe," from on the one hand, and strolling bodies and burning hearts on the other. Similarly, the poet employs the theme of dream as another layer within the space of her memory to explore a desire to escape her foreign land or perhaps to relocate the "red soil of the Pamba River". Nevertheless, this desire remains clearly a figment of a daydream that perhaps changes itself to a painful reality:

I feel my writing hand split at the wrist.  
 Dark tribute or punishment, who can tell?  
 You kiss the stump and where the wrist  
 bone was, you set the stalk of a lotus.  
 There is a blue lotus in my grandmother's garden,  
 its petals whirl in moonlight like this mountain.(7-12)

*Illiterate Heart* is another collection of poems in which she delineates the exile and its impact on poet's imagination. The poem *Provenance* which means 'Place of Origin' suggests her obsession with the places. The poet tries to search the lost self with the help of poetry after migration because poetry became an only evidence for her existence. Creation of

poetry, loss, and memory has been deeply related to her migration. So she calls her muse as "O muse of migrancy" (14) in the poem *Indigo*. The poem *She Speaks to a Man in a Red Shirt* presents the narrative of loss in the process of exile and assimilation. The exile is responsible for making the poet bereft of history and bereft of past, "We are poor people / a people without history" (1-2). The history has been lost from the poet, which she can imagine only in dreams. Because of this loss, the journey of the poet has been termed by her as, "FROM THURSDAY ON TILL NEVER / THIS JOURNEY IS A NARRATIVE OF LOSS" (15-16). Thus, her poetry records what has been lost in her journey from the place of her birth, India, to the place of her work: the U.S. In most of her poems, Alexander tries to recapture and preserve what is being irretrievably lost to her: family lore, cultural moorings, and a lived past.

*Quickly Changing River* (2008) is a quest for home. It is luminous with all the weathers and warmth of childhood days in her homeland. Journeying through her childhood, she tries to find her roots and establish her identity. Childhood memories are filled in her poem *Torn Grass*, in which she reminisces about her 'amma' or mother. She says that, "Childhood is a hot country, amma lives there" (1). She remembers the "Changanacheri Fair" (3) from where, "we had spiced pomfret, mangoes so riped their sweat/Stained the damask tablecloth my dying mother left me" (7-8). But the image of her grandfather who sexually abused her in childhood, changes the mood of the poem. When the grandfather appears, "Clouds swelled the mirror, broke its rosewood frame" (11).

*The Storm* is a poem of five parts, in which Alexander's poetic voice seeks accountability to a history of migration and dislocation as it affects so many ordinary people, whose anonymous stories are evoked in *The Travellers*:

Migrant workers  
 stripped of mop and dirty bucket,  
 young mothers who scrub kitchen floors  
 in high windowed houses  
 with immaculate carpets,  
 .....  
 Tired chowkidars seeking their  
 Pennies out in a cold country,  
 students, ageing scholars,  
 doctors wedded to insurance slips,  
 lawyers shoveling guilt  
 behind their satin wallpaper. (137-141, 146- 151)

The theme of displacement appears in myriad forms in Alexander's poetry. In the poem, *Udistanam*, meaning base or foundation from the volume, *Atmospheric Embroidery*, she writes with near Biblical allusions:

Where are those refugees  
 Amma did not want me to see,  
 Gunny sacks and torn saris,  
 Stitched together with cord?  
 Breath of my breath, bone

Of my bone, dark god  
 Of the Nilgiris,  
 Who will grant them passage? (21-28)

In another poem from the same collection called *Tarawad*, meaning home in her native language, Malayalam, she brings out the tragedy of leaving home thus:

Unseen umbilicus  
 That tethered me  
 Even as the ocean  
 Swept on and on.  
 Going, going, gone!  
 Someone banged the gavel,  
 Hearing the house was sold  
 She lay down in the mango grove  
 And stopped her eyes with stones,  
 Crazy girl, inconsolable!  
 Where is she now? (13-23)

To conclude, Meena Alexander's poetic creation came out as a result of her dislocation and identity crisis. She considered her poetic career as an escape from the intricacies of her multiple migrations. Her creative world gave her a space of freedom, a graceful freedom that reduces her earthly burden of the painful experiences. For her, place became a palimpsest of her memories, imaginations and desires. Alexander envisions myriad selves that distance her away from the confines of specific identity and national constructions. As a poet, Alexander is not easy to follow and even harder to grasp because of the multiple references that go into layering her poem. Her poetry opens up a space for researching the various levels of diasporic life.

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## New Historicist Reading of Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers*

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### *Abstract*

*The paper analyses the novel What the Body Remembers by Shauna Singh Baldwin from the perspective of the theory of New Historicism. It looks at the reasons behind the genesis of the much researched work of historical fiction locating the text in the political, historical and socio-cultural context. Baldwin rewrites the troubled past which is firmly indicated by the usage of the word 'Partition.' The paper attempts at locating the novel in an historical hour, re-reading the historical text within the 'frame' of history.*

*Keywords: New historicism, partition, history, patriation.*

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New historicism or Cultural Poetics as propounded by Stephen Greenblatt in *Renaissance Self Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980) is a theory that makes a contextual study with an attempt to study and understand history through literature. New historicism shares a view of historicism of unreliability of historical facts and further, propounds that a work of art is the result of cultural and social constructs at the time of its production. The view is supported by Hayden White, the postmodern historian, who propagates the idea of undependability and indeterminacy of historical truths. Looking at the theory of historicism briefly, the term historicism is defined by the theorist Hamilton in the "Introduction" to his book *Historicism* where he says, "Historicism . . . is a critical movement insisting on the prime importance of historical context to the interpretation of texts of all kinds . . . Historicism emerges in reaction to the practice of deducing from first principles truths about how people are obliged to organize themselves socially and politically . . . Firstly, it is concerned to situate any statement-philosophical, historical, aesthetic or whatever-in its historical context. Secondly, it typical doubles back on itself to explore the extent to which any historical enterprise inevitably reflects the interests and bias of the period in which it was written. On the one hand, therefore, historicism is suspicious of the stories the past tells about itself; on the other hand, it is equally suspicious of its own partisanship" (3).

According to Hamilton, the most important aspect in analyzing literature is that no text is non-contextual, that it does not exist in isolation: the text cannot be moved out of the context and be given a meaning in itself. An oversimplification of the term historicist criticism simply suggests reading and analyzing literature without separating it from the

historical context. The meaning of a text can only be established historically and it emerges only when placed in cultures those are located historically. The society, culture, politics and various other social institutions come together in shaping a text contextually. Apart from studying history as a 'co-text' new historicists were widely influenced by Foucault's concept of power. The historical archive is largely a storehouse of supremacy and revolt and is predominantly shrouded by relations of power. The desire for a better future is, as Milan Kundera in his book, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* suggests, tangentially proportional to the understanding of the past--the more penetrating the knowledge, the better the chances of escaping it. Past keeps on prodding the present as either an ideal or a concept alongside a paradoxical perpetual demand for contestation of the uncontrollable. The historian with an understanding of this paradox makes an individualized systematic study of the past so as to weaken its hold. A libratory aspiration could be infused in historical investigations which, he suggests, are carried out in new historicism. Power is influential and motivates almost every human deed. Understanding of the concept of power in modern times is different from traditional times. Where, power in totalitarian regimes was absolute, dictatorial, oppressive, and excruciating there, in modern times, it has come to be seen as more persuasive than brutal, more productive than repressive, a normalising factor that leads to productive results than being a coercive force. Foucault in *Power/Knowledge* asserts:

If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good . . . (is that) it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things; it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs throughout the whole social body. (119)

Power as an ideology operates ubiquitously even in the absence of the means to power. Life of a man is regulated by an awareness of its presence even in its absence. Banning of certain texts by the government is an indication of the explicit power that written words have and can exercise. Words have the power to destabilise the smooth functioning of the world and that, writers with their dissident writings can resist power and desist hegemonic ideas and bring productive change in the society, brings forth the importance of literature as a harbinger of change. Nevertheless, power constitutes a "relationship of domination and resistance . . . (and) apart from its repressive dimensions, is highly productive in human discourses." (U.R.Anusha 1). The Foucauldian concept of power is central to new historicism. Foucault and new historicists consider power more as generative and productive leading to identity formation rather than a delimiting or a reductive force. Fiction with its dialogic attribute privileges the author with presenting multitudinal perspectives and ideas from a safe aesthetic distance. Any literary genre is the product of an ideology of its writer who is a product of a particular historical period. Fiction is seen as a resultant imaginative cultural, political, and a social artefact. Specifically, the historical novels have immense relationship with the sociopolitical and economic history of a nation: nations can be imagined to form, cohere, or break into novels. Benedict Anderson defines a nation as: It is an imagined political community-and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is *imagined* because even the members of the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of

their communion. (6) (emphasis original)

Fiction apart from being a representational genre, is also an effective and a powerful mode of discourse. Negotiations between history and fiction are more frequent as compared with other modes of literature. It is through such negotiations that a contextual placement of *What the Body Remembers* by Shauna Singh Baldwin, in history could be possible leading to analysis of reasons behind its genesis as conducted in the paper. In the words of Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt:

This approach accords well not only with our anthropological and cultural interests, but also with our rather conservative interest in periodisation . . . Explication and paraphrase are not enough; we seek something more, something that the authors we study would not have had sufficient distance upon themselves and their own era to grasp. (7)

Shauna Singh Baldwin, though born in Montreal (Quebec), Canada, grew up in Delhi, where forty percent of the population consisted of refugees from Punjab. The pain of Partition was a familiar ache, along with the immigrant's obdurate determination to survive and succeed. Partition survivors brought their stories with them . . . (Rajan 1). Hence it is imperative for her to have come across Partition and its remnants in various cultural representations like novels, short stories, poetry and media including cinema and televised serials like *Buniyaad*, a programme telecast in the 1980s on the theme of Partition. Apart from this, another source of reminder as she claims in her interview with *The Hindu* journalist Anjana Rajan, were the people and their stories from Punjab. And these she renders visible in her award winning story *What the Body Remembers* (1999), with personal perceptions and experiences of two women related to each other in a polygamous marriage representing the nuances of such an association from a woman's perspective where the two women characters in the novel do not have a say explicitly, also highlighting, the migration amidst the turmoil and violence from Lahore to Delhi along with the hundreds of thousands of others.

The novels of the male novelists on the theme of Partition are clearly patriarchal in their representation for having conspicuously missed women characters and their voice. Khushwant Singh in *Train to Pakistan* and Chaman Nahal in *Azadi* are clearly patriarchal in their representation for having conspicuously missed traumatized women characters and their voice. Besides there have not been novels in English written from a Sikh woman's perspective. Talking about the rich galaxy of women protagonists in her novel, Shauna Singh Baldwin in an email interview to *The Hindu* states: "Women are subjected to the most negative messages (from more powerful men and women) saying women's life stories aren't real or important. But women's life experiences can be recreated through a writer's imagination, and the truth told to power. Whether power will listen or change is a different matter, but we know that written and oral histories have made a difference throughout history, and can do so again (Rajan 1).

In an article, "*What the Body Remembers: A Feminist Perspective of the Partition of India*," Radhika Purohit argues "being extremely vulnerable women become easy targets

of every form of oppression. This evil is further compounded if they are placed in unstable political societies or events. As in other moments of ethnic conflicts in the world, the rape and molestation of Hindu, Sikh and Muslim women before and after the Partition followed the same familiar pattern of sexual violence, retaliation and reprisal. It is an established fact that in all wars and holocausts it is women who have been humiliated, deprived and discriminated. *What the Body Remembers* is the first ever attempt to view the Partition through the experiences of women. Since only women have undergone those specifically female life-experiences, only they can speak of a woman's life" (91).

In an interview with Rennicks, Fiction Editor of Borders.Com, Baldwin mentioned that her writing rose "from a sense that there is something missing, a subject, a story, or an area that has received too little attention, and *What the Body Remembers* rose from that same dissatisfaction. For her the travails of the sub-continent are equivalent to the female body. In her much acclaimed novel *What the Body Remembers* (1999) she rewrites the troubled past which is firmly indicated by the usage of the word 'Partition.' The novel *What the Body Remembers* saw the light of day after the year 1997 - the year of commemoration of the sacrifices of the Sikhs, respectively, in the year 1999 thus, giving the writers a platform to empathise with women and men of Sikh community in the backdrop of historical moment of the Partition of 1947. Shauna Singh Baldwin having lived in Canada for a considerable part of her life and being of an Indian descent, has voiced the uneasiness of people empathising with them on an emotional level, with a focus on women and the Sikh community in India and abroad. Fiction opens a moment to a dialogue where writers have the freedom to talk about subtleties of emotional stability or instability of characters. Writers apart from disclosing facts to readers also talk about the complexities and ambiguities accompanying the cataclysmic moments which is rarely done by non-fiction. Baldwin's conviction is that "when we read news reports and other non-fiction, we read in our own voice and are never called on to relinquish our own point of view. When we write or read fiction and plays, we have to set aside the Self to become the character. So fiction augments empathy, wakening each sense in ways non-fiction cannot. If you want to simply convey information, non-fiction is best" (Rajan 1).

The observations of Urvashi Butalia, an eminent woman theorist on Partition and Oral histories are quite pertinent in the context of narratives as *What the Body Remembers*: . . . the importance of remembering a violent history, for the sake of those who lived it and died; those who lived through it and survived; and those who may have had little to do with it directly, but are deeply involved with taking its legacies-negative as well as positive-into the future" (*The Hindu* 1).

Not only the horrible happenings at the time of Partition but also the genocide of Sikhs in 1984 and the bombing of Air India Flight in 1985 continue to engage the creative consciousness of the writers over and over again. Another trigger point for Shauna Singh Baldwin to visit history of Punjab and write about Partition as a second-generation and diasporic creative artist, without having experienced it first-hand with a temporal and spatial separation and a geographical distance from the place of its execution, through the medium of documentaries, oral histories, history books and other print and visual media, is

the sectarian violence that accompanied Quebec's demand for sovereignty in 1990s, an idea advocated by Prabhjot Parmar in her article, 'Moving Forward Through Still Facing Back: Partition and the South Asian Diaspora in Canada' (198).

The 'silences' that still scream in individual and collective memories of victims of communal violence and communal division of the territory are finding a vent with increasing efforts being made by contemporary writers. The growing awareness of the lack of research carried out in this area of study has hastened efforts with writers undertaking research to revoke history and talk of the less exhausted areas. Prabhjot Parmar supports this idea through a statement by a Punjabi writer in her article saying, "Punjab and Punjabis have not explored Partition, they have maintained a mysterious silence. Perhaps they are making use of silence to deal with the complexities related with Partition" (195). It is owing to this lack of exhaustive study of certain complexities that this area yet remains viable for a research to be undertaken by research scholars in the present and in times ahead. "There are numerous stories that need telling and layers that need careful unpeeling to let the profound implications of Partition days come out into the open and generate discussions of issues lying dormant under a shroud of silence" (Parmar 193). The desire to remain rooted to the Indian roots that compelled Shauna Singh Baldwin to write the novel *What the Body Remembers* as she confesses in one of her interviews, "... wanted to retain a connection to my heritage" (Scalia).

Commenting on the title of her novel, Shauna Singh Baldwin says, "The title has a multilayered meaning. A surface meaning rises from the fact that Roop means body, form/shape. So in a sense, the story of *What the Body Remembers* is what Roop remembers, is meant to remember, is expected to remember, and in some ways what she "re-members" at the end of the novel by remembering Kusum and maturing into a stronger, less ornamental woman. Remembering Kusum and all the women like her who were sacrificed during Partition would make history more whole. In addition, the title refers to ancestral memory, collective memory/the subconscious and how it feeds our fears, appropriate or not. Fear then influences our actions, especially when the State sanctions violence by promising not to hold anyone accountable. At another level, the metaphor of the 30s and 40s in undivided India was the body--the country as body, woman as womb for the tribe. And the story (of Partition and loss of the country's "children") is what the whole country remembers as part of its creation story, its birth pangs" ([www.shaunasinghbaldwin.com](http://www.shaunasinghbaldwin.com)).

Owing to this fact, diasporic writers may not differ entirely in their quests as the memories from the past transport along with them to the new land. The memory and the slightest instigation of a communal disturbance from the outside world provokes these writers to evoke bloodstained memories of communal riots from the past. "... (such incidents) spur(s) them to respond to issues such as the rise of Hindu fundamentalism in India in the late 1980s and 1990s by retrieving Partition history that foregrounds the dangerous territory of communal divisions" (Parmar 193). These macho imagination of the writers of the diaspora at times have portrayed the massive naked dance of destruction at the time of partition, and violation of the women from Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communities but their narratives have miserably failed to dive deep into the psyche of the



wronged women. Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers* essays a probing leap into the female psyche to lay bare what it means to be Satya, a barren wife of foreign educated Sardarji who has married a young beautiful damsel, Roop to perpetuate his progeny. Satya's troubled state of mind and earthly wisdom is beautifully captured in these words, "a woman is merely cracked open for seeding like the earth before the force of the plough. If she is fertile, good for the farmer, if not, bad for her" (8). Her painful sense of being betrayed and cheated ruptures her forbearance and she tends to be vindictive, insolent and intolerant of Roop. When she gets the custody of Roop's daughter and then her son, the mother in Roop experiences intolerant pain but knows that she was married for this purpose. Roop's pain does not belong to her but on higher frequencies this pain belongs to all women who are victims of patriarchal set up. Despite Satya's shortcomings and deficiencies Baldwin's portrayal of Satya evokes sympathy and admiration, especially at the point when she is full of remorse and memories of her past deeds: "I am not a wife, for my husband has abandoned me. I am not a widow, for he still lives. I am not a mother . . . I am not a sister, for I have no brother. With no father...And so I am no one" (308).

When Roop bears two children, Satya demands that the children should be given to her. In order to placate Satya, Sardarji compels Roop to agree, perhaps to overcome his guilt of being unjust to his first wife and perhaps also to project himself as a just and benevolent husband to both. However, Roop does not comply and demands the ousting of Satya from the house. So, Satya, angry and heartbroken is left behind as the rest of the family moves to Lahore. Unable to bear the indignation and isolation she kills herself. Her spirit later permeates Roop, especially during her perilous journey with her children from Lahore in Pakistan to Delhi in India in search of safety. Elaborating on the novel, one observes that the Partition between Satya and Roop in the story and their struggle to assert their rights on their husband and children in the house serves as an allegory to the partition of the nation and the ongoing political struggle. The story of marriage is used as a metaphor for the story of both exile and uprootedness from one's home with the meaning of home constantly evolving and changing for both women. As Anjana Basu puts it, "the novel explores the self-division that exists in India in which feudal and secular values try to make place for each other, much as Satya and Roop do in their husband's house. It is a self-division that leads not only to the problems in the marriage, but culminates in the political violence of the country's Partition." As Anjana Basu puts it, "the novel explores the self-division that exists in India in which feudal and secular values try to make place for each other, much as Satya and Roop do in their husband's house. It is a self-division that leads not only to the problems in the marriage, but culminates in the political violence of the country's Partition" (<http://www.sawf.org/newedit/edit03182002/bookreview.asp>).

Satya's death brings an incomprehensible change in Roop. As the narrative unfolds, "Satya will live on in Roop, the way every older woman who uses a younger one is reincarnated in a betrayed young woman's body. Sister and sister they will truly be, the way they could never be while Satya was alive." Such an empathy, understanding and intimate observation could flow exclusively from the pen of a creative woman author. Through this narrative Shauna Singh Baldwin gets connected to her heritage, the Indian roots. Besides,

while male and feminist historiographies have restored Partition survivors' memories of violence to the historical archive, Baldwin's novel explicitly foregrounds the grueling uses to which women's bodies and spirits are put, exhumes and retells "the story of family violence against women during India's Partition, intended to "save their honor" from rioting mobs."

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**Growing Up Through Deprived Childhood: Subaltern Child  
In *Surviving in My World***

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*Abstract*

*Manohar Mouli Biswas is an eminent Bangla Dalit writer and literary activist. His works in Bengali or English translations occupy an important place in Dalit literature of India. His is a great revolutionary Dalit voice, specially from Bengal. His autobiography, poems, stories and essays speak of the sorrows and sufferings of the oppressed Dalit people in the caste-ridden Indian society. The present paper endeavours to read Biswas's autobiography *Surviving in My World: Growing Up Dalit in Bengal* (2015) as an alternative space that raises a voice about his 'deprived childhood.' The autobiography explores the silences of the Dalit community and speaks on 'issues of class, race and caste' through the first person narrative of a child growing up 'uncared' with limited (or no) access to the privileged 'centre.' It opens the horizon of 'invasive' Dalit assertion in the postcolonial form of questioning, disrupting and subverting the elite aesthetics with colourful exhortation.*

*Keywords: Dalit, Childhood, Sufferings, Speak, Voice, Subaltern.*

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Write, what's not written  
Speak, what's not been said. (Biswas 50)

The name of [this] history of life and death is *prisnika*- growing up like the water hyacinth and dying like it, uncared for. I was born into such a community and that is how I grew up in my deprived childhood. (Biswas 48)

These two quotations flow from the pen of Bangla Dalit writer and activist Manohar Mouli Biswas in the form of *Poetic Rendering As Yet Unborn* and his autobiography *Surviving in My World: Growing Up Dalit in Bengal* respectively. In making self-representations public Dalit writers of the world emphatically register their voices, assert and strengthen cultural identities and meanings through authentic lived histories. Life-writing has been proved as an active key for these subalterns to speak (*what's not been said*) and write (*what's not written*) that collocates various fields as traditional and experimental autobiography, oral history, testimonial writing, memoir, biography, auto-ethnography etc. By attempting to uncover the wretchedness and distresses of the Dalit life and experiences through first-hand versions these life writings create an aesthetic of difference that plays an important role in reconstructing the Dalit cultural historiography in the present postcolonial context. Following the line of Dalit autobiographies written in Hindi, Kannada, Punjabi, Tamil,

Marathi and Bangla, Manohar Mouli Biswas's *Surviving in My World: Growing Up Dalit in Bengal* (2015) has also created an alternative space that raises a voice out of empathy and lived experiences. Here a memory, amnesia, belief, attitude and present positions of the author together reveal the past, the childhood, the growing awareness of injustice and humiliation that provide 'an insider's voice, which is otherwise difficult to get from conventional archives' (*Text of Liminality* 1). Biswas's 'deprived childhood' openly explores ideologies and cultures from a 'marginalized position,' and do make the silences of a Dalit community 'speak on issues of class, race and caste' through the first person narrative of a child growing up 'uncared' with limited access to the privileged 'centre.'

*Surviving in My World* locates numerous strands that delineate a *namasudra* family of pre-Partition East Bengal passing days of untouchability, turning refugee in India and becoming the followers of radical tradition of the Matua sect interrogating the notion of caste hierarchy and *brahmanical* domination. The autobiography begins with the first person narration. The first person narrator articulates the painful experience of caste discrimination from the stand point of a Dalit child. The narration moves from past to present in exploring the various events that happened in his life and that of the Dalit/Namasudra in a caste based society. It moves from the village to city with the tormenting experiences of a Dalit child and some childhood memories. From Biswas's account we can identify how the poor *namasudra* peasant families in a far-off Khulna village "lived their daily lives, experienced material deprivation and caste discrimination, participated in their quotidian religious lives that defied established boundaries of organized religion, aspired for and achieved limited social mobility, responded to the outside world of colonial modernity, rejected mainstream nationalism, and were unsettled and displaced by Partition" (xiii). Sharmila Rege, as discussed by the translators in the introductory part of the book, favoured to call such Dalit life narratives as 'testimonies' and speaking on the significance of these Rege emphasizes that the narrator of these testimonies claim some agency in the act of narrating and speaking by which they "contest explicitly or implicitly the 'official forgetting' of histories" (xxvii). Besides the innumerable aspects of the hierarchical disjuncture and asymmetrical power relations in mid-twentieth century rural Bengal, the narrative renders the colloquial east Bengali or Khulna dialect, wrestling poverty and scarce opportunities of childhood practicing the Dalit customs, participating in their economy and cultural practices- all the authentic markers of subalternity.

Structurally the autobiography of Biswas has two separate portions: the first part deals with the memory of childhood in his village in Khulna district in the 1940s and 1950s, and the second part consists of interviews or conversation of Biswas with academics, Jaydeep Sarangi, Mohini Gurav and Angana Dutta. These bring into light the life of a Dalit literary activist in contemporary West Bengal. While describing his childhood Biswas mentioned that he had a community that "remained neglected away from the watch of the nation's administration. The people born in nature, lived in their own way and even died in their own way. The name of this history of life and death is *prisnika*- growing up like the water hyacinth and dying like it, uncared for. *I was born into such a community and that is how I grew up in my deprived childhood*" (emphasis added 48). The childhood of Biswas was like a hyacinth,

automatically was born in some closed water, and grew up and bloomed without anybody's care. He highlights their subaltern living by giving details of childhood memory, sometimes comparing their status with the privileged upper castes. What he has communicated in the autobiography is not the life story of a person who had a standard life. "Those who are born in light, who go to school in childhood holding hands of their parents, those who get two full meals a day, wear new clothes during festivals, wear shoes, get medical treatment in illness, show no signs of ill health on their bodies, wear warm clothes in winter, those who grew up in love and care--this story is not their story" (*Text of Liminality* 20). The lower caste *Nama* children who 'grew up among the muddy waters, who went to school rowing a simple palm-leaf boat' had little in common with such privileged life. Being a child educated in the first generation and a child-labour in the agricultural field, seller of homemade *nal* mattress and also as an inferior boatman (or sometimes grazing cows) he perceived the discrimination among people based on caste.

In an interview published in *The Wheel Will Turn*, a book of his poems Manohar Mouli Biswas spoke about his autobiography: "I have taken very long time to write my autobiography but it is not a big volume. It is only 128 pages. Only the portion of my childhood, the days how I had been in school from a poor joint family, the phenomenon what the untouchables are to undergo in village life, the illiterate parents how do they think of the education of their children and very particularly the ways and means of their passing the day-to-day life throughout the year I've depicted . . . This autobiography is nothing but the life of a child-labour who had worked in the agricultural field along with his poor and illiterate parents. The hardship of a particular caste-group people, say *Namashudras* and who had been previously called 'Chandals. During the times of my forefathers and who had been living in the rural marshy localities and mainly living on the agriculture are shown here. It's story how they have been marginalized economically and socially in their life and their struggle to move forward" (78). Sekhar Bandyapadhyay in his *Texts of Liminality* (2014) presents a brief view about the Dalit autobiographies from Bengal. There he talks about the isolated living of Biswas's *namasudra* community as residents of 'fringe dwellers'--"The Biswas family remained in a physically isolated space. The 52 villages- primarily inhabited by *Namasudra* and other low caste peasants, agricultural workers and artisans--around the big marsh or *bil* constituted their physical world . . . when there was flood in the *bils* and salt water destroyed the crops, the family faced starvation and survived on wild vegetables and fish. This poverty kept the *Namasudras* insulated from the outside world" (16).

Manohar Biswas, 'consciously in his reconstruction of childhood memory,' shows the elements of contradiction in everyday experience of his people. He witnessed the death of his father and his elder brother's first son because of inadequate medical facility and the political independence of the country side by side. The isolated living of fringe dwellers separated from ten-mile away *Kayastha-brahmin-baddi* neighbourhood is also highlighted through the cycling and walking of Suren doctor through the muddy path to reach *shudra* village. He mentioned the *barowari* Durga puja in *Namasudra* villages where no Brahmin priests but inferior priests (called *baun*) of the outcastes performed pujas. In childhood he saw a lot of discussion about nationalism and religious beliefs oscillating among Matua

Dharma, Vaishnavism, Hinduism etc. He described his community as Hindu with a deep faith in Matua religion of Sri Sri Harichand Thakur where his mother 'used to run the flowing end of her sari all over' their bodies and say, 'I beg you Harichand heal such and such of mine . . .' (51-52). The *visarjan* procession of Durga *pratima* was done in the traditional Hindu ways through the '*baran*' ritual of bidding goodbye, *dhaki* playing drums, blowing conch shells, dancing etc. along with the age-old familiar community martial arts performed by curly haired 'warriors' carrying 'big chopper' for a 'mock fight.' But most important is the Dalit consciousness that was developing in child Manohar which questioned the killing of *Asura*, 'the dark skinned naked man,' 'a child of this land' and a 'human' by mother Durga. He did not find difference between 'the dark skinned naked man' and curly haired 'warriors' dancing in the procession. He disagreed that 'the naked dark-skinned person depicted an evil force of this land' (70). He saw that the community did not follow many of the customs or laws of the Hindus rather they reformed some social practices like penance of widows and initiated widow marriages.

But it was not religion rather 'poverty hung like a sword over the head.' Under the sway of poverty many families of his *Namasudra* community could not arrange for rice. He said, 'husking rice out of paddy and eating that boiled rice was natural' for them. Eating *shaluk* stems as vegetables, *shapla* fruits or *dhaep*, kochu-leaf (taro) and 'parboiled rice of coarse grains' for survival they had become experts in living a subaltern life--a 'heritage handed down to us through many generations' (75). Happy days of childhood of Biswas were being passed by fishing, roaming with pig breeders, trapping *babuis* in the *nal* fields and plucking ripe dunker fruits in a wild plum jungle. But this childhood playing always turned to be painful for the thorny dunker trees and they found themselves 'bloodied bodies.' The references of thorny 'dunker trees' and 'bloodied bodies' are assumed to be metaphorical for greater Dalit experiences. The *Nama* boys had relationship with leeches, mongoose and snakes as they had deep animosity with these animals in their daily living. Trapping *babuis* in the *nal* fields at night and the fear of snake bites are also the part of it. Biswas confided that "tales of childhood smeared with nearness to snakes and leeches survive as living in the corner of my mind even today" (76). Humble scenes of impoverishment are exposed in the homes made of straw or *gol* leaves and in the tattered condition of their clothes, where some private part of the body got uncovered 'through the wear and tear of the cloth.' Biswas describes the childhoods of his community as "living epitomes of a life extremely simple and abstemious, living on two handfuls of rice a day, a life of enjoying the beauty of nature while living in its midst, learning to tolerate scarcities and complaints. This pattern was not of one life, but that of generations" (39). As a child he witnessed how 'people of mud and water' living on their physical jobs, were victims of discrimination even in their attempt to become boatmen. The higher caste Hindus preferred to board the boats of the Muslims to the boats of *shudras*. This is one of the examples which widen the gap and created the boundaries of intimacy with lower castes, accepting only in head count for making Hindus the majority. Anger bursts forth when Biswas says, "Socially, economically, culturally and educationally, we were a massive heap of garbage at the bottom. Human communities are a matter of national resources. But we failed to transform ourselves into resources. We remained a waste . . . this question disturbed me in my childhood . . ." (56). The subaltern living of a

boatman and others is described in opposition to the comforts enjoyed by the people of 'white collar jobs' who hired boats for enjoying the fun of a boat ride. The condition of their subaltern living mirrors through his poem "While in Boyhood" from *Poetic Rendering As yet Unborn* which is worth quoting:

My papa used to wear coarse cloth of short length  
 An undressed body, bare feet  
 A cheap napkin on his shoulder remained haphazard...  
 He used to carry the reeds on head to sell in market.  
 ...  
 The younger son used to help him in carrying loads  
 Sometimes his elder had shared also  
 Sometimes mother arranged duck's eggs to sell  
 The boy carried it on head in a cane-made carrier. (Biswas 37)

Biswas sweetens the memory of his childhood with delicious pork- 'my ma cooked pork deliciously!', 'pork was a favourite food of the community I was born in,' 'a food for the lowly people generally arranged stealthily and was looked down upon by the upper castes' (9-10). The expression 'you are all pork-eating namas' was hurtful but something very true. The child Manohar was surprised about the sensitivity of some people about others' food habits.

Belonging to a marginalized Dalit family the child faces the dilemma of his parents regarding education where his *jethu* found education would not change their fate of manual labour and the recruiters must find 'deficiencies in the children from illiterate families' (5). But his father believed that education would change the scenario and would be 'improvement in the hereditary occupation'. Through this dilemma the study of a Dalit child was started with dry 'palm leaves' and 'soot' collected at home and diluted in ink pot. The way to school from home sometimes required walking barefoot or sometimes rowing boats made by cutting a betel nut tree when the paths got submerged in water, express the child's passion for study. The days of early education filled with suffering and pain find poetic expression in his poem "Baba's Countenance" in the anthology of poems, *The Wheel Will Turn*.

I tell the tale of our torn pockets to grandson  
 In the new class old books I would collect free on cost  
 And for this I would go to the village of my third aunt  
 For an inkpot and nib I too go to the second aunt  
 I would collect the paddies from field, left remnant... (Biswas 62)

The most important specimen of coercion was seen in the usage of language. The rustic language or dialect spoken in his family was not permitted in the formal school or *pathshala* in his village. Neither the formal education in the country nor the language of the texts of the country used their language. The community language should be erased and with it the community feelings and associative meanings should be uprooted for the sake of higher

caste people. They had to drill in the upper caste language. His teacher Amulya Master said, "Forget the language you learnt in the womb. The faster you can forget the faster you can learn the language of the books. The path of education will become smooth" (3). Biswas consciously uses the colloquial east Bengali or Khulna dialects 'as an authentic marker of their subalternity.' He uses many words that bear special community meanings such as *thaurbhai*, *kantha*, *purutpurut*, *dheki*, *charal*, *gamchha*, *gatar*, *kansha*, *kayastha-brahmin-baddi*, *namas*, *nal*, *dhaep*, *talai*, *ojha*, *Pellad for Prahlad*, *shudder for shudra*, *tappa*, *Bhayoman*, *Thaur* etc. The language structure of the autobiography highlights the social discrepancy between Dalit and the high caste Hindus. Biswas deliberately suggests this 'linguistic dichotomy as a signifier of social differentiation' (*Text of Liminality*19).

The childhood memory brings some community beliefs that can also be called superstitious in nature. The portrayal of *Joteburi*, an aged wise woman can be cited here. Her paste made of certain creepers worked wonders for the bleeding wounds of the children playing in the dunker jungle. As a future teller *Joteburi* felt some premonition of grave danger which was taken seriously by some members of the community. Superstitious attitude can also be seen in the episode of *Muron kaka* who was possessed by a ghost or *petni* and also in the practice of *ojha* for curing patients of snake bites. Besides, the humble enjoyment or amusement of the impoverished life is revealed through the depiction of marriage ceremony in the practices of singing lyrical songs, playing on the *aar*-the bamboo flute, role playing from some *jatra-pala* etc. Their poverty did not 'sour them and they remained engrossed in their world' where they fashioned 'their world in their own style' (38).

Biswas emphasizes the significance of family bonding, kinship with river, jungle, animals and sufferings that can teach Dalit children to live with tolerance in a society laden with upper caste values- 'bloodied bodies' among the thorny dunker trees. His childhood memoir does not consider nature as a commodity but shows a kind of filial relationship treating different elements as members of community live in close proximity. He humanizes nature and finds a reflection of his mind in it as a part of organic connectivity. His community depends on nature for their sustenance. Different elements of nature, other than the agricultural fields, such as waters, rivers, forests, trees and fountains have been part of their life. Their life and culture have a close proximity with their environment. This region is also rich in natural resources such as '*dhaep*' or *shapla* fruits. Biswas describes the technique of collection of '*dhaep*' from watery lands and procedure of its cooking in emotional terms--its enjoyment and need goes hand in hand. It is the sole food for survival to the people suffering from poverty or in times of famine. Becoming nostalgic he recalls the beauty, sight and smell of the food which used to be close to him and his community: "We were used to eating parboiled rice of coarse grains. With the rice, innumerable fish out of the wetlands and canals, *kochu*-leaf (taro) preparation, fried *shapla* with small prawns or fish, formed our diet and we felt it was our eternal tradition" (74). It can be seen from these descriptions how nature is intimately related to Dalit identity, language and cultural practices. The trace of subaltern consciousness can also be found in a child's observation of nature. Biswas's experience of observing the movements of the big fish and small fish is the revelation of the



inner life of a community. In the movements of the big fish he observed a 'shadow of aristocracy.' It was 'the swimming in a team along the current they lived a comfortable life' (72). He finds 'every type, staying apart, used to act aristocratically depending on its community' (72). On the contrary of this comfortable-along the current-aristocratic swimming there is a 'humble,' 'unwanted' and 'mismatch' swimming of *chuno* or *puti*—the small fish. These little fishes were 'joyful just to live' and were 'just happy to remain alive'. A sense of injustice or segregated world was revealed to the child author. He categorically voiced: "I found profound similarities in the people of my community with these non-aristocrats" (72). It metaphorically exposes the existence of caste-based discrimination and the power structures—a dominant structuring or interpretative frame.

The child in Manohar feels himself (themselves) incurably lacking advantages. The echo of the same notes of lacking and disadvantages spreads throughout the writings of Manohar Mouli Biswas, as in the poem, "A Separated Courtyard Room" in *Poetic Rendering As yet Unborn*:

I live in the separated courtyard  
 Unable to break the borders as they are weak  
 In the damp slimy corner  
 With old soot and dust  
 Like a fly caught in a cobweb  
 I go on shedding even to this day  
 Those tears of eternity. (Biswas 40)

But such deficiency cannot inscribe a sense of inferiority in Manohar. He does not exhibit the devastating consequences of internalizing dominant standards of upper-caste privileged sections. Rather he stresses the rich heredity of his community being the 'children of the sun', 'natural warriors of physical labour,' 'hardworking people by birth,' 'spontaneous travellers in the rivers,' having unconscious 'kinship' with the rivers and 'infinite power of the sun.' Biswas represents the possible resistances subaltern child can engage with. Expressions and comments like "I have a sense of pride about my community . . ." (61), "We had become experts in living a life . . ." (75), "We had fought long for sculpting a dignified identity . . ." (9), "The *nama* community did not have the dowry system" (37), ". . . social reformers had started the practice of widow remarriage a long time ago" (51), "Talent was not something limited to the text books. Any task of physical labour needs talent to be completed properly," (64), "The *nama* community has given birth to many poets, and needless to say the stock of their creation was huge" (38)—subvert the contrived privileged space and widen the scope of dalit consciousness for the child. Here the metaphor of '*prisnika*,' the water hyacinth can be interpreted from a different perspective. The 'uncared' water hyacinth, Wikipedia reads, is an 'attractive flower, mostly lavender to pink in colour' but it is also known as 'invasive species' that is uncontrollable and covers lakes and ponds entirely. Thus, the metaphor opens the horizon of 'invasive' Dalit assertion in the present postcolonial form of questioning, inquiring, disrupting, and subverting elite aesthetics with colourful exhortation. Here the primary narrative voice belongs to the child and by

employing child-narrator; Biswas explores how marginalized or subaltern children negotiate various kinds of binaries between *Kayastha-brahmin-baddi* neighbourhood and *shudra* neighbourhood, between electric lighted roads and muddy roads, between privileged childhood and underprivileged childhood and between upper caste and lower caste. These experiences of the child-figure are charged with the urge of a Dalit voice to speak the unspoken, as the writer himself speaks in his poem "Give Water" (*The Wheel Will Turn*):

My thirst widens over sky and air  
My thirst is age old.  
Sobs icy-cold choke me quite.  
Look mother, gentle tears cleanse the dark;  
Your mute children wake up to light! (Biswas 52)

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## Subverting Ableism in Children's Literature in India: An Analysis of Zainab Sulaiman's *Simply Nanju*

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### Abstract

*With the emergence of disability studies as a discipline primarily in the U.S., U.K. and Canada at the end of the previous century, popular culture has come under the critical eye for promoting ableism, thereby segregating the 'normal self' from the 'abnormal other.' One of the geneses of this increasing fetishisation of ableism may be located in the portrayal of disability in children's literature. It has been found that children's literature across the globe is fraught with binary oppositions of good/evil, white/black, beautiful/ugly, rich/poor and many more that have been efficacious in indoctrinating children with the politics of 'othering.' Besides being segregated within the institutionalised education system, disability has been misrepresented and/or underrepresented in children's literature produced in India. In recent times, a number of Indian writers have emerged who have been putting in substantive efforts to de-stigmatise disability among children. This paper explores one such work – a novella titled *Simply Nanju* by Zainab Sulaiman, published in 2019. In the light of disability studies, the paper analyses Sulaiman's text as an interaction between the social and medical models of disability, and highlights the ways in which she subverts institutionalised ableism. Keywords: Disability studies, ableism, *Simply Nanju*, Zainab Sulaiman, children's literature.*

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### Introduction

The timeless tradition of storytelling has been instrumental in training individuals to imagine everything and everyone in terms of readymade labels and in considering ableism as the normative framework of human ability. In most of the classic children's literature, protagonists have perfectly abled bodies, whereas disability is a signifier of evil. Hanna Björg Sigurjónsdóttir in her article titled "Cultural Representation of Disability in Children's Literature" points out:

The most famous pirate story in history, *Treasure Island*, is a good example of how the author uses impairment to create a climate of fear: the pirate Long John Silver is described as having a wooden leg, Black Dog is missing two fingers, and Pew is blind. The description of the one-legged Captain Ahab serves the same purpose in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851/2009), and the same device is also used in Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1911/2004), where the one-armed Captain Hook is even named after his impairment. In these books children can recognize evil characters by their physical appearance. (120)

One might argue that disability studies has only emerged as a discipline at the end

of the previous century and therefore antiquity may enable classics like *Treasure Island*, *Moby Dick* and *Peter Pan* to seek lenience in criticism. However, Sigurjónsdóttir also points out that this attitude towards impairment can still be seen in children's literature, the iconic example being the Harry Potter series where Harry's archenemy Voldemort is a man without a nose. Though Sigurjónsdóttir defends Rowling by stating that Harry too is a visually impaired boy who wears glasses and carries a scar, it is needless to state which one appears graver to the reader. The portrayal of impairment and disability in children's literature plays a pivotal role in enabling children to choose a position as a reader. Joan K. Blaska, in her essay "Children's Literature that Includes Characters with Disabilities or Illnesses" states that children's books need to perform at least two functions for the child, if not more. One is that of a window, which will enable her/him to perceive the world around, which might not exactly reflect her/his own experience or surroundings, thereby bringing some new knowledge. The other is that of a mirror, where the child may be able to look at characters which resemble his or her experiences and feelings. Sigurjónsdóttir also observes that the western society pays a considerable amount of attention to the notions of health, beauty and fitness (115). This attention is evident in what the society ends up in introducing its children to and accounts for the existing fetishisation of ableism. According to Professor Dan Goodley, "Ableism's psychological, social, economic, cultural character normatively privileges able-bodiedness; promotes smooth forms of personhood and smooth health..." (21). Consequently, in its obsessive engagement with the able body and "smooth forms of personhood," the Western society can hardly boast of having produced children's literature that employs disabled children into playing substantively positive roles.

One of the prevalent norms has been to treat disability as a disease that demands a cure or a condition, which needs to be miraculously 'normalised.' This coincides with the medical model of disability, which, according to Gillespie-Sells and Campbell, views disability as a condition that needs to be cured. On the other hand, there is the social model of disability, which "indicates that disability is exacerbated by environmental factors and consequently the context of disability extends beyond the individual" (Burke 14). Burke explains further that all models of disability basically indicate that disability is a social experience of people with impairments whose conditions are transmuted into barriers, thereby making them unfit for 'normal' social interaction and often subject to oppression (14-15). Yet another concept, which has mostly been used in fairy tales and folk-tales, is to present disability as a warning or punishment for poor conduct (Sigurjónsdóttir 119). These logics have navigated numerous plots of fairy tales and hence we have the ugly frog transforming into a handsome prince after the princess kisses it, and Pinocchio's nose growing longer with every lie he says, thereby making his face 'disproportionate'. Blaska clarifies that disabled characters in children's literature either draw sympathy for their vulnerability or generate fear for being the 'deviant' other. Because of this, children who read these books, develop a notion of the 'normal' self and learn to identify and segregate a 'disabled' person, rather than learning ways of understanding and accepting people with disabilities (116).

### **Disability Studies and Children's Literature in India**

In order to discern the larger picture of disability in India, one needs to question whether the

children of our country are sensitised for developing an adequate understanding of disability in and around them. Mithu Alur, in her 2003 book *Invisible Children: A Study of Policy Exclusion* claims that our approach towards disability reeks of a dichotomy between policy and practice. Children's literature in India has hardly produced content that sensitises children towards disability and enables them to accept differences. In her article titled "Indian Children's Literature Featuring Characters with Disability," Chitra Paul, a trained special educator and an autism and inclusion advocate, enlists a few recent publications in India, which have important characters played by disabled children. Her list includes books like *A Walk with Thambi* (2017) by Lavanya Karthik, *A Helping Hand* (2016) by Payal Dhar and *Against All Odds* (2017) by Ramendra Kumar – all of them dealing with impairment and its social repercussions. Paul's enlistment also includes *Simply Nanju*, a text that possibly addresses the yawning gap between policy and practice as pointed out by Alur. This paper explores Zainab Sulaiman's novella *Simply Nanju* that weaves a commentary on impairment and disability into a fast-paced whodunit. The following section of the paper is a discussion on Sulaiman's portrayal of disability as one of the attributes of a child and not his/her generic identity.

### **A Window or a Mirror? A Discussion on *Simply Nanju***

Zainab Sulaiman, the author of *Simply Nanju* is a special educator herself, and probably that is why her book is marked by a nuanced depiction of disability that may easily be comprehended by young readers. The narrative traces the journey of Nanju, a ten-year-old Tamil boy who, along with his friends, solves the curious case of missing books in his class. It is significant to note that right from the beginning of her narrative, Sulaiman puts more emphasis on developing her characters based on their daily experiences in the United Integrated School and disability happens to be merely one of the aspects of their 'normal' lives. Giving us a hint at the protagonist's condition, she writes: "Wearing a diaper did not bother Nanju very much. Though he was ten years old, it was as normal for him as pulling on a pair of socks or lacing up one's sneakers was for other kids" (1). In the very next passage, she describes Nanju's impairment which is a defect in his spine. Owing to this "He won't know when to go to bathroom –" as told to his parents by the doctor (2). In the story that stretches across 122 pages, Nanju's disability is discussed only in page number 40, as the author writes: "Nanju walked with a sideways motion and he looked a little like the pendulum of a broken clock that swung violently from side to side" (40). In comparing Nanju's gait to the movement of a pendulum, the author takes a dig at the conventional gravity and pathos with which disability is mostly discoursed upon. Young readers may perceive this as a difference and not necessarily as deviance from the norm. The next character Sulaiman introduces us to is Mahesh, Nanju's best friend, confidant and the mastermind who actually finds the one who had been picking books from the bags of their classmates. The narrator says: "Mahesh was exceptionally smart, something that most people tended to overlook when they first saw him" (5). This statement exposes the general approach of the 'normal' society, which overrates ableism thereby overlooking core values. With intermittent details about these children who suffer from one or the other kind of impairment, Sulaiman more or less maintains the ambience of a conventional school where children engage in regular banter, bully each other and seek their teacher's attention in particular and attention in general. On a usual day, during a break, a child, like Nanju – who has an unusual gait and wears diapers at

ten—“...did his final diaper check and headed to the courtyard where the regular rush of hurrying, hobbling, walker-pushing, wheelchair-racing children were enjoying the last few moments of freedom”(11).

Armaan, the first suspect of the book theft is introduced as a child who “loved any kind of attention” (8). Gradually we come to know that he is a feeble child who is mostly wheelchair bound and it is with an empathetic understanding of his condition that the detective duo: Nanju and Mahesh come to the conclusion that it might be practically impossible for Armaan to commit the theft. Kevin, the boy whom Nanju catches red-handed while he was stealing saplings from the school nursery is a non-disabled boy but belongs to a dysfunctional family. His mother works as a housemaid in Dubai and his father is a drunkard. He lives with an aunt who has “children—and many problems—of her own” (21). Here Sulaiman raises the issue of children who do not get an adequate environment in their growing years. This inadequacy, in turn, affects their lives in an acutely adverse manner. Probably the author intends to extend the definition of disability beyond the physical body, thereby engaging in a broader semantic exploration of the term.

The novella emphasises the requirement of empathetic teachers in school who are endowed with the ability to detect their student's vulnerabilities in and beyond the physical body and treat them accordingly. Theresa Miss—Nanju's class teacher—suspects Pratik, the new boy in the class to be a victim of domestic abuse right from the time of his admission, as she had been noticing marks of abuse in his body. When Mahesh solves the mystery of the missing books by logically deducing Pratik as the only possible suspect for the theft and reveals the same to the teacher, instead of thinking of punitive measures, Theresa Miss rushes to Pratik's home out of concern. She finds him hospitalised due to immense injury that he received that morning when his father discovered that he had been stealing other children's books and passing on as his own to avoid his wrath. Thus, the perpetrator of the 'crime' that had been going on in the class of late, turns out to be a victim himself, and his abuser too is shown in a sympathetic light. Similar maturity is shown in the Principal's handling of Kevin's case as she provides details about the boy's dysfunctional family to Nanju, so that he sympathises with Kevin. She asks him to “be kind to him and behave normally” (116). Behaving 'normally' may here be interpreted as the author's exploration of multiple possibilities of disability. Interestingly, both the students who are found guilty of mischievous activities are traced back to disabled families, which fail to perform the function of nurturing their child adequately. The fact that parenting plays a major role in shaping a child's understanding of disability is portrayed in Nanju's Appa, who is a caring father and a righteous person who asks Nanju to “Learn to be responsible” (2) and his late mother. She is described by the third person narrator as somebody who “had a special gift for loving everything that came her way—listless jasmine creepers that refused to blossom, lame street dogs that had been kicked out of their packs, the neighbourhood 'mental'... and she had shared this love for the world with her son...” (41). Following his mother's ideals, Nanju now remembered to put out milk in a small saucer for the old black cat that was gradually losing its eyesight. Nanju's parents made him realise that there were people and animals and plants around that were neglected for being 'different' and hence needed kindness and care. Nanju helps Mahesh with his wheelchair

and ties his shoelaces as and when needed. This also serves as the mouthpiece of the author for redefining disability, for diluting the differences between ability and disability in the child-reader's mind. Here, it would be relevant to mention Sara Hendren, an Associate Professor of Arts, Humanities and Design at Olin College of Engineering, Massachusetts, who, in an interview with Ankur Paliwal for *Nautilus*, talks about the need to de-stigmatise assistive technologies surrounding disability. She states that all technology is assistive. However, we use the term 'assistive technology' in the context of disabled people, which is completely uncalled-for. The same logic may be applied to wheelchairs, as there is a lot of stigma attached to using it (Paliwal). In her endeavour to de-stigmatise wheelchairs among young readers, Sulaiman makes it appear at regular intervals in the text. During the Fancy Dress competition in the United Integrated School, wheelchairs and walkers are shown to function as essential props for the children to demonstrate their themes: "Bottle boy had empty plastic bottles hanging off every part of him and his wheelchair," "Milk Boy tottered around on his walker . . .," "Small forests . . . had been built over some of the wheelchairs" and the 'Provision Store,' whose mother had creatively made a store out of his wheelchair (83). The wheelchairs and walkers provide an agency to these children. The text thus becomes a site for debunking the dominant representations of disability and discovering alternative interpretations of impairment.

Usually, the characterisation in children's stories enables the child-reader to identify hero/villain and good/bad in no time as the binary is categorically maintained throughout the story, following the principle that "human behaviour must belong to one or other category – but not both" (Sim 235). Sulaiman's text challenges the correlation between oddity and disability as promoted by many children's stories. She gives an insinuation of this endemic nature of our society while describing Mahesh's appearance and Nanju's gait. She writes:

Like many disabled people, Nanju and Mahesh were often at the receiving end of endless bullying and teasing. When most people first saw Mahesh – with his oversized head and pint-sized body – they tended to shrink back in horror. And Nanju, with his sideways pendulum walk and simple open face, never failed to evoke a laugh. (69)

As seen in the passage, she compares Nanju and Mahesh to 'many disabled people' in their common experiences of social ridicule but never addresses them as one. Her book promotes the idea that disability is a relative term associated with socio-cultural inclusion and is not synonymous to impairment as explained by Barnes and Mercer, who define impairment as a bio-physiological limitation and state that disability is about restrictions in activities that stem from social experiences (66). Sulaiman thus locates her characters on a 'spectrum of varying ability' (Paliwal) and behaviour, thereby enabling the reader to resist the stereotyping of impaired people as disabled.

Moreover, despite government schemes and programmes which promise to assimilate Children with Special Needs (CWSN) into 'normal schools,' the very rhetoric of these manuals highlights the gap between planning and action whatsoever be the reason/s. Sara Hendren rightly points out as she says: I think disability is partly a medical identity,

and partly a political identity. What our culture needs to hear, though, is how disability is a political identity, because we live in a time where disability exclusively exists on the body. Your legs don't work, so therefore you are disabled. Actually, you are not disabled by your legs not walking, you are disabled by infrastructure and cities and towns that are built with stairs and without ramps. (Paliwal)

Sulaiman's narrative is attuned to Hendren's comment as she commendably encapsulates her critique of the insufficient infrastructures in Indian children's parks, where the children find it difficult to navigate their wheelchairs and a member of the park authority complains to Theresa Miss for the tenth time that "You should have told us about the wheelchairs" (53).

### Conclusion

In conclusion, it may be argued that besides performing the functions of a 'window' and a 'mirror,' children's literature also needs to act as a 'lamp,' which enables children to gain better vision to introspect and see each other. Sulaiman's story invites adequate interaction between different worlds and realities of children, and in so doing, represents impairment in a new light. By foregrounding a school that promotes self-sufficiency among children and treats the impaired and the non-impaired impartially, Sulaiman reviews the subordination of 'disabled' people that consolidates ableism. It can be argued that she subverts institutionalised, paternalistic ableism in children's literature in India. As Fiona Kumari Campbell quotes H. Hahn in her book *Contours of Ableism: The Production of Disability and Ableness*:

Paternalism enables the dominant elements of a society to express profound and sincere sympathy for the members of a minority group while, at the same time, keeping them in a position of social and economic subordination. It has allowed the non-disabled to act as the protectors, guides, leaders, role models, and intermediates for disabled individuals who, like children, are often assumed to be helpless, dependent, asexual, economically unproductive, physically limited, emotionally immature, and acceptable only when they are unobtrusive. (sic. 19)

Mahesh's successful investigation of 'the case' with the help of Nanju and Ronit, Nanju's fearless confrontation with the able-bodied Kevin despite being aware of the impending consequences and these three boys getting rewarded by Theresa Miss as they become the prefects-in-training indicate that impairment does not necessarily lead to disability. Mahesh, Nanju and Ronit might be impaired in different ways, but their ability to sustain themselves and protect others enables them to take up the roles of protectors, guides, leaders and role models. Reshaping perspectives towards disability requires a paradigmatic shift in our culture of story-telling. The stories that are told to children when they are at an impressionable age do make a difference to their lives. In conceiving a story, which challenges the dominant discourses on disability, Sulaiman calls for a brand of literature that stops labelling people as categories and promotes a better interaction among them. The United Integrated School, hence, is a microcosm for the ideal society where human compassion compensates for impairment and the onus of building this society lies



on the young shoulders – the target readers of this book.

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## Rising Scepter of the Gaze: Surveillance from Literary to Online Space

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### *Abstract*

*Surveillance and control are not new terms. For as long as human history extends, surveillance of the deviant, surveillance of the convicted as well as surveillance of the masses has been a relevant aspect of administration, control, law and order. If one were to look at literature as a window to social reality, one would inevitably come by several instances where surveillance has been used as a means to extend authority and control. Literary narratives throughout the twentieth century have been imagining and even prophesying a world of total surveillance and absolute authority. The absurdity of human existence in a world of total incorporation has been the focal point of literary masterpieces of Orwell, Kafka, Zamyatin and many other prolific writers as well as philosophers and theorists like Bentham, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari among others. This paper is designed to trace the trajectory of surveillance from being a dystopian threat to an ever-expanding experience in reality in the context of contemporary online surveillance.*

*Keywords: surveillance, dystopia, web 2.0, resistance, totalitarianism*

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Surveillance is generally understood as a means of keeping watch over a fixed or general target to ward off any contingent threat. This method of defense against possible danger seems to offer the warmth of security, law and order. In a similarly positive way, Anthony Giddens offers a theory of neutral surveillance, which he describes as “the coding of information relevant to the administration of subject populations, plus their direct supervision by officials and administrators of all sorts” (1984: 183). This definition of surveillance mechanism as a system of collecting and collating information by watching over people is a requisite for proper management and maintenance of law and order and is an essential aspect of administration. Contrarily however, the very system of surveillance poses a threat to individual security and privacy, and creates a space of absolute dominance and control whereby power is perpetuated and the masses are disciplined into subservience. Subsequently, theories of negative surveillance suggest that any form of surveillance is informed with a system of power and hierarchy and is therefore dominating in nature.

This paper is focused on connecting the prophecies of a dystopian state based on absolute negative surveillance and totalitarianism, that can be found in prominent works of literature in the twentieth century, with the state of penetrative and all pervasive surveillance orchestrated through the World Wide Web in the contemporary times. The paper will further underscore the complicity of the surveilled and speculate on the possibility of

resistance to absolute control in the current context.

### **The Literary Forewarning**

A backward glance at the twentieth century literature offers a wide range of examples wherein the threat of a totalitarian state is presented through absolute surveillance and incorporation. In Yevgeny Zamyatin's 1924 novel *We*, the protagonist D-503 is exhibited as a generic participant of a homogenized society that furthers its totalitarian agenda by curbing the individuality of people and converting them into non-unique entities that are easy to control. The ultimate agenda of the surveilling authority to ensure complete compliance from the surveilled is represented as an essential requirement to maintaining total control, and it is only through interaction with a mysterious woman I-330, that the protagonist learns of the control he is under. George Woodcock wrote of *We*:

The tendency towards industrial regimentation in the 1920's gave [Zamyatin] the idea of a world where statistics, and the outlook associated with them, became the dominant force in shaping both the outlook of rulers and the character of the society they establish – a crystalline, higher-mathematical order where *men become merely the figures in gigantic equations*. (1956: 92; my emphasis)

A similar direct example of ensuring control through curbing of individuality and executing total surveillance can be observed in Orwell's prophetic dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1949) that presents a world order which is under complete surveillance by the “thought police” that is constantly monitors the thoughts and actions of the people and maintains a desired form of law and order. Gorman Beauchamp observes of Orwell's work that “the technology of Oceania enables the Party to keep members under constant surveillance. Telescreens make the slogan 'Big Brother Is Watching You' almost literally true” (1989: 5). This absolute surveillance enables the development of a totalitarian state in Oceania. Beauchamp further comments on the technology employed in Oceania to establish total control, saying that “the world of 1984 is metahistorical, containing things that the world has never seen (5). However, Orwell himself suggests the impossibility of envisaging future technology and state of affairs when a decade before the publication of *Nineteen Eighty Four* he comments on future totalitarianisms as invincible because of the reducing possibility of resistance to rising surveillance through “mass-suggestion” (Orwell and Angus, 1968: 380-81).

In both these novels, a totalitarian system is displayed in which the participants are aware of being watched and controlled and attempt to break out of the totalitarian system causing much havoc and 'disturbance'. On a slightly different tangent, Franz Kafka's 1925 novel *The Trial* presents a protagonist who is accused of an unrevealed crime and prosecuted by an unseen authority. The absurdity of K.'s existence in a world of absolute and unidentifiable authority foretells of the hierarchies of a real world a century later.

Similarly, in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (1967), Tom Stoppard depicts the absurd predicament of two minor characters from Shakespeare's celebrated play *Hamlet*, who are

unaware of their role in the larger scheme of things and are used as dispensable entities who are allowed no agency. In Act II of the play, the frustrated protagonists exclaim, "We have no control. None at all.... They are taking us for granted" (71-72); and then, "As soon as we make a move they'll come pouring in from every side, shouting obscure instructions, confusing us with ridiculous remarks, messing us about from here to breakfast and getting our names wrong" (85). This existential crisis of the powerless masses, the ordinary citizens, participating in the drama of life that they cannot fathom or make sense of, is depictive of the concentration of control in the hands of the powerful few who are not only dictating their terms to those below but also monitoring all their actions to preempt any resistance or even individual thought process. That these powerless entities are often complicit knowingly or unknowingly in the drama of totalitarianism is the central concern of the contemporary situation that Stoppard's play underscores.

### **The Architecture of Surveillance**

[The Ministry of Truth is an] *enormous pyramidal structure* of glittering white concrete, soaring up terrace after terrace, three hundred meters into the air... a thousand rocket bombs would not batter it down. [It comprised of] three thousand rooms above ground level and a corresponding ramification below [where people worked in] long *windowless halls*, with a double row of cubicles. (Orwell, 1949: 7, 26, 38; my emphases)

The Benthamite structure of the panopticon, ensuring full visual control with the disciplinarian has been a standard starting point for any discussion of power politics based on surveillance. In his *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault explains, with reference to a plague outbreak, that the surveillance of the masses in isolation to control the spread of the disease enhances the power of the authorities to an unquestionable extent, making the plague a *desirable* state for the power structure (1995: 198).

The surveilled are seen as actors isolated from each other and placed so that they may be visible without being able to see the surveyor. Of the sections of isolation in which the surveilled are isolated, Foucault says that they are:

small theatres, in which *each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible*...it reverses the principle of the dungeon... - to enclose, to deprive of light and to hide - it preserves only the first and eliminates the other two. Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protected. *Visibility is a trap*. (199; my emphases)

Foucault further says of the panopticon that "it is the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form; its functioning, abstracted from any obstacle, resistance or friction, must be represented as a pure architectural and optical system" (205). The constant visibility of the surveilled and a simultaneous invisibility of the surveilling authority to the former is mandated to ensure perfect discipline. The surveyor is not visible to the surveilled but the presence of the former is manifest in the structure of the panopticon. Foucault understands the panopticon as a means to watching without being seen. The invisibility of the surveyor

lends him an absolute power in that he is immune to the counter gaze.

### **Entangled in the Web**

As we enter the age of communication revolution triggered by the development and unbridled growth in scope and power of the World Wide Web, the question of surveillance becomes a fertile point of cultural debate. In a seemingly egalitarian space, the web ostensibly promises equality in terms of voice, presence and power to all its users indiscriminately. Inasmuch as the web accords space and authority to any and all users and becomes a platform where conflicting forces can be openly voiced and deliberated upon, it is perceived as an innocuous, if not empowering, space. But the structure of the web is also rife with hierarchies and is riddled with surveillance systems. With the coming of the age of “web 2.0,” that is defined by Tim O'Reilly as the age of social media, surveillance online has become an even more significant category of contest and research.

Jerry Kang, while talking of online surveillance mechanisms, defines the surveilling gaze as a mechanism by which, “personal information is acquired by observing who we are and what we do...[through] non-consensual and extensive” measures (1999: 3). Elsewhere, he says, that this collected information is “aggregated” to aid target marketing and to enhance profitability (1998: 1199). However, surveillance is not only designed to aid sales-centric marketing planning, it is also a means of controlling the masses for commercial and political ends. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari identify this aggregation through what they call “surveillant assemblages” (1987). Focusing on information and data as the primary trope of cultural manipulation, the aggregation of data online becomes a means of directing social opinion and culture, which echoes what Orwell had identified as “mass-suggestion” back in 1939.

The idea of challenging the surveilling power structure then necessitates a reverse or counter-gaze directed from the erstwhile surveilled to the erstwhile surveilling intent on turning the power structure upon itself. The identification of authority is a prerequisite to any attempt at wresting it from the dominant structure, as exemplified above in the works of Orwell and Zamyatin. But the World Wide Web is designed in a manner where the surveilled are not only denied a possibility of a counter gaze towards the surveilling, often the former are completely unaware of being watched too, much like K. in *The Trial*, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

In the absence of a counter-gaze which is clearly imperative for the subversion of the gaze of the powerful, the web offers no possibility for resisting the surveillance to the users. The discourse of online freedom and empowerment so often lauded by apologists and users alike, is a thin disguise from behind which the unchallengeable authority of the online surveillance system looms large upon the world.

One may argue however that the same means that allow those in power to watch over the powerless, can allow the latter to watch over the former. Christian Fuchs notes in “Surveillance and Critical theory” (2015), that the World Wide Web does offer some

decentralized surveillance opportunities as well, in that it is not just those in power who can watch over the powerless, the latter can also independently watch over the former using the means of online surveillance. But the powerless cannot see the powerful surveilling them. Using the example of surveillance of the masses by the National Security Agency (NSA), he says: "The NSA monitors your use of Google and Facebook, but you do not monitor the NSA monitoring you, which shows a fundamental power asymmetry" (7). Further the funding and access required for extensive surveillance are not available to the masses, leading to an absence of "participatory surveillance" (7), and causing a panopticon-like surveillance system.

Julie E. Cohen says of the panoptic view of surveillance that it functions both descriptively and normatively. It does not simply render personal information *accessible* but rather seeks to render individual behaviors and preferences *transparent* by conforming them to preexisting frameworks. And in seeking to mold the future, surveillance also shapes the past: by creating fixed records of presence, appearance and behaviour, surveillance constitutes institutional and social memory. (2008: 186)

Insofar as the World Wide Web becomes a space for aggregating information and for moulding the past and present of the users to create a conformist space, the web becomes a space of colonization than liberation. This online space, which is often glorified as one of freedom, borderless and endless inter-action, is in fact one of extreme control, divisions of power and monitored and tailored interactions.

In their putative private spaces, net users tend to believe that since they are not physically visible and existing online through coded IP addresses, and manipulated (or even fabricated identity handles), they are not accessible or exploitable. The veritable anonymity that the online media ostensibly provides to users make them oblivious to the informational accessibility and data visibility that their online existence is revealing. Julie E. Cohen talks of this informational visibility as that of greater harm and explains that the online system seduces users to reveal data and become accomplices in the surveilling system (187).

Much like the "small theatres" of Foucault's description of the panopticon, the World Wide Web offers handles to users where a sense of privacy is assumed by the "actors". The dungeons of the World Wide Web, like those of the panopticon, serve the purpose of isolating, but not those of hiding. But in the absence of the tangible visibility of the surveyor, once again like in the panopticon, the users are eluded into believing that their privacy is secure. In the absence of a physical or tangible presence peeping on their computer or mobile screens from behind their shoulder, they fail to perceive the constant presence of the artificial intelligence devised to stalk every move and every click of the users online.

Data aggregated online is often perceived as harmless because of its indecipherability to the common viewer and users fail to realize the potential capacity of that data in creating analytical tools and aggregating mechanisms that can be and are exploited by all interest holders in ways that are profitable and mostly in offense of ethics. Oscar Gandy elucidates

that the aggregation of data and categorization of individuals based on online surveillance is a “panopticon sort” that involves the use of “discriminatory technology” so as to classify users in homogenous groupings and subsequently augment power and/or profit for the surveilling authority (1993: 15).

Further, the surveillance that online users are subjected to is often claimed to be innocuous. Service providers often suggest that information aggregated by them is only a means of customization, or at worst, targeted advertising. Service providers often deny any nefarious or strategic aggregation of information by them and assert that all information given by users remains encrypted and therefore far from being misused. What becomes questionable however is that encrypted data is data still and at best it can be described as data in a different language: a language which users cannot comprehend or use but a language which nevertheless remains decipherable.

It is bewildering to note that despite reports about data leaking, audio and video surveillance online, recording of chats, location updates and other personal data, aggregation of data and misuse of information in the form of rumours, allegations and what were called “conspiracy theories” by Mark Zuckerberg in his 2018 statement in the defense of Facebook to the US Congress, and reports as exposing as the Bloomberg report of 2019 (Frier), that provides incriminating evidence of data mining and data leaking by portals such as Facebook, Apple and Google, users tend to have a rather indifferent attitude to online surveillance bordering on a tacit acceptance of it. The absence of an equal reverse gaze not only hides the surveilling authority, but also immunizes the surveilled into a kind of contract by which the latter give their consent to being surveilled or rather seem to think about it as a kind of necessary price to pay for the benefits of being online.

The creation and manipulation of points of view, direction of masses to think and act in a certain way and orchestration of political and social realities is often not perceived as a direct outcome of online surveillance, and even when the connection is made and revealed, the reaction is often not one of outrage, but of a passive acceptance of the normative structure of online existence.

With the expansion of “mass self-communication,” which Manuel Castells defines as the sharing of personal information oneself by a majority of people (2009: 55), “the object of information” and “the subject of communication,” as Foucault defines in his theory of surveillance (1995), do not remain separate entities and become blurred. Christian Fuchs notes in his 2011 work:

Web 2.0 surveillance is directed at large user groups who help to hegemonically produce and reproduce surveillance by providing user-generated (self-produced) content. We can therefore characterize web 2.0 surveillance as *mass self-surveillance*. (138; my emphasis)  
With Fuchs' theory then, the line between the surveilling and the surveilled blurs to the point that the challenge to surveillance becomes a self-debunking call for the latter. The producers of information are not only the objects of information, but also the consumers of

it, in that they are a part of consumption of information generated by other users. This blurring of the line between the producer and consumer of the information creates an identity of the prosumer (producer and consumer) for the users and places surveillance in a space where its intrusiveness seems questionable.

In the case of the World Wide Web, the gaze of the surveilling authority is complete, while the disintegration of the surveilling authority becomes implausible considering that this authority is not manifested in an individual or a community. Rather, power is now integrated in a systemic manner in the very fabric of the network. In not being concentrated in one individual or one institution, the surveilling power is now far from being identified and isolated. It is rather a part of the system of which the surveilled are a significant agent. The surveilled are so embroiled in the system of surveillance that they themselves contribute towards the empowerment of the surveilling system.

Insofar as the World Wide Web becomes a space for aggregating information and for moulding the past and present of the users to create a conformist space, the web becomes a space of colonization than liberation. This online space, which is often glorified as one of freedom, borderless and endless inter-action, is in fact one of extreme control, divisions of power and monitored and tailored interactions.

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## Ecocide in Paradise: Eco-connect and the Anthropocene in Sarah Joseph's *Gift in Green*

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### *Abstract*

*Ecocriticism evaluates the relationship between humans and nature as depicted in the narratives of fiction. An important thought process of ecocriticism is to question the rampant use of ecocidal practices that favour the anthropocentric economic knowledge of Western industrial capitalism and choose to ignore the sustainable eco-practices followed by many indigenous communities. Sarah Joseph uses the narrative of *Gift in Green* to stress upon an informed understanding of land ethic that is alert to the fact that, in contemporary times, the local environments exist within the clout of global capital and if a suitable solution is not found to address the issues of ecological preservation and economic stability, then these bioregions will cease to exist.*

*Keywords: Ecocriticism, Ecocide, Sarah Joseph, Anthropocene*

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Ecocritics like Cheryll Glotfelty, Glen A. Love, Alfred Crosby and many more believe that human beings are much responsible for the destruction of nature. They allude to an impending ecocide, if the materialistic pursuits of humankind are not checked. Furthering this thought, a few Indian philosophers like Madhav Gadgil, Ramachandra Guha, Vandana Shiva foreground the idea that the massive environmental changes being caused in the indigenous regions are fuelled by the capitalistic ideologies of materialism and accumulation and if the greed of the human race is not contained, the world may head towards ecocide. The term "ecocide" was coined by Arthur Galston, an American biologist at the Conference on War and National Responsibility (1970). The word derives from the Greek 'Oikos', meaning "house or home," and the Latin, meaning "to demolish or kill." Thus, ecocide literally translates to "killing our home." In 2010, while proposing a definition of the term ecocide to the United Nations, a legal perspective on ecocide was provided by Poly Higgins: "the extensive destruction, damage to or loss of ecosystem(s) of a given territory, whether by human agency or by other causes, to such an extent that the peaceful enjoyment by the inhabitants of that territory has been severely diminished" (63). Re-confirming this perspective, Pramod. K. Nayar avers that the environment is being "increasingly lost to pollution, contamination and industry-sponsored bio-disaster. It is now a truism to say that mankind is efficiently committing ecocide, making the planet inhospitable for life of any kind" (241).

Keeping this philosophical framework in mind, the present study analyzes *Gift in*

*Green* (2011) by Sarah Joseph, an Indian English writer, from the perspective of ecocide. The novelist addresses this issue of ecological health and gives a warning that if our priorities towards ecosystem are not re-assessed, the world may head towards murkier grounds of existence. The novel hints at the contemporary ecological conundrum faced by postcolonial countries to address the global environmental concerns without losing any economic advantage for their home countries.

Sarah Joseph, born in 1946 at Kuriachira in Thrissur city has published a trilogy of novels which includes *AalahayudePenmakal*, *Mattathi*, and *Othappu*. Her works are essentially liberalistic and convey the sentiments of various subalternised groups. The novel *Othappu* is about a woman's yearning for a true understanding of spirituality and her own sexuality. *Othappu* has been translated into English by Valson Thampu under the title *Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side*. Her novel *AalahayudePenmakal* won her three major awards – the Kerala Sahitya Academy Award, the Kendra Sahitya Akademi Award, and the Vayalar Award. In 2011, Sarah won the Muttathu Varkey Award for her collection of short stories titled *Papathara*. *Gift in Green*, (2011) written originally in Malayalam is an eco-spiritual search for light and life in a world inching towards dystopia. It is an unconventional narrative that explores the pain and hurt that eventuate from the disruption of the intimate relationship between people and their land. Using water as a metaphor, Joseph mirrors the degradation of the society in the name of growth and development.

In the epilogue to the novel, Joseph issues an eco-warning: “Like the last of the trees, like the last of the residual streams, a few minds, a few silvers on the earth's surface, still hold their own. ... like wordless warnings that history does not afford a return journey to the Aathis we choke to death” (X). She criticizes the ecocidal practices and suggests a paradigm shift from the anthropocentric ideologies of western industrial capitalism towards an understanding of eco-centricism inherent in many indigenous communities. The narrative of *Gift in Green* focuses on the premise that “The filth we create, we must clean up ourselves” (29). She furthers this thought and also presents forth two world scenarios- utopia and dystopia- both extremely fictional but relatable. As Niji C.I. states “Sarah Joseph juxtaposed the two worlds, the pre-Kumaran Aathi and post-Kumaran Aathi, in order to lament the loss of the utopian purity and also to create awareness toward the degradation of the environment” (46).

The narrative takes the reader into the mystical and mythical world of Aathi, a fictitious lagoon that snugly lies in the womb of “an enchanting world”, a “mangrove forest that the people of Aathi affectionately called the Green Bangle” (25). The novelist depicts the land of Aathi situated on an island of Valanthakkadu in Ernakulam district of Kerala. Located in a serene environment, the land is bereft of all noise, pollution and traffic of the outside world. It presents a perfect model of an ecosystem, self-sustaining and immune to the cacophonous voices of development. The enchanted “virgin forest, untouched as yet by hands of violence” (33) carries a mystical aura around it with glowworms dancing and

mussels singing the glory of the universe. There are no signs of modernity yet in Aathi, with people sleeping on mats, each home sowing rice, and each family enjoying the companionship of ecology. The natural world and the human world live in complete harmony with each other. To a reader, the place seems like a utopia or a paradise that exists only in the annals of literature, but Sarah Joseph insists that it is “neither a Utopia nor an escapist world of make-believe. Even today you can find Aathi-like places of primeval purity” (XI). The entire concept of a lagoon placed between a green-bangle lends an earthy richness to the novel.

The characters in *Gift in Green* live in communion with the water of Aathi. The people of Aathi depend on it for their livelihood, their spirituality and their inner peace. Sarah Joseph writes, “There had been a covenant between them and the water. The fish, the frogs, the crabs, the oysters, the birds, the butterflies, the reptiles, the grass, the bushes and the mangrove forest were all signatories to that water covenant” (201). In the Indian cultural idiom, the Rigvedic hymns refer to water as a great cleanser which stands second in significance to Agni. It is written in *Rigveda*: “Waters have healing powers, they drive diseases away; they have a balm for all, let them make medicines” (RV.X;137;6,7).

In *Gift in Green*, the water emerges both as a metaphor on which the writer places her warnings of ecocide and as a character, who by replenishing the wrong done to it comes in support of the people of Aathi. The novel reassesses this bond with water in the light of modern-day, technological advances. Presenting a dystopian scenario, Sarah Joseph shows how the life of Aathi displaces when this bond with the water is broken. A lagoon where “No one had ever dared to take advantage of ... Other than birds, squirrels, snakes, garden lizards, chameleons and crickets – familiar denizens of the forest” (4), now faces the forces of urbanization and commercialization in the form of the character, Kumaran who had left the land of Aathi in search of better prospects and luxuries of life. Now powered by the capitalist ideology and hegemonic mindset, Kumaran tries to devastate the biodiversity of Aathi. His dream project involves an investment of Rs. 10,000 crores, generation of Rs. 50,000 jobs, landfilling of every square inch of land wrongfully registered in the name of benamidars and shadow companies that only exist on paper with a motive to set up an industrial town which will be later sold at an inflated price. The project is sold under the “whirligig of unfamiliar words” (224) like 'techno-park', 'township', 'neo-liberal', 'cyber-city' that create a semblance of an enchanted world far superior to the existing one. He initiates this process of development by enticing young men with lucrative jobs, sowing the seeds of mistrust towards farming and invoking the power of money in their minds. He asserts: “The very first that you need to do, if you wish to begin to live, is to give up your blind faith in farming. Acquire skills and start a trade, instead. Make money. There is nothing you cannot get if you have money in your pocket...” (216).

Sarah Joseph alludes to the environmental issues marring the landscape of Kerala, including the pollution of Chakkukandam Lake in Guruvayoor, and the disadvantages of the Athirappally hydel project. The references to the water at Chakkam Kadam being a black, gluey mix of human excreta and decomposed fetuses, Guruvayoor acting as waste

disposal centre and the land of Kaddapuram vanishing due to the illegal mining activities of the sand mafia are meant to paint a realistic picture of Kerala for the reader.

Echoing the words of Adrian Parr that “[s]ustainability considerations that are not cultural are not sustainable...” (166), the narrative allows the people of Aathi to find solutions to the problem of environmental destruction. While Dinakaran and his associates follow the righteous path of addressing grievance through government machinery, Ponmani and his friends choose the path of violent protest, Shailaja adopts the method of self-immolation, and the little girl whose boat got stuck in Meenawari decides to pick the piles of garbage herself. The water of Aathi also participates in this activism as a shamanic force capable of refreshing and purifying the polluted water through its baptismal quality and the pristine purity. In a dystopian sequence, the floods wash away all impurities and the water engulfs in its bosom the temple of gold, drawing “the earth back into its cavernous womb” (348).

Talking about her eco-connect, Sarah Joseph avers “My environmental activism stems from my intuition of the umbilical cord that connects the human being with the earth” (GG XVII). The narrative represents her ecological vision through the spiritual celebration of water. By exploring the unique practices and eco-friendly culture of Aathi, the novel presents an eco-vision that is both practical and sustainable. For the people of Aathi, their life is a perpetual baptism of water as they truly answer to the call of water: “Am I not the flow of life itself? If I were to stop flowing, life itself would come to a halt” (209). The settlement in Aathi is conceived with a purpose to break all barriers of religion, caste or race. The people here belong to only the ecology of the land. They live in harmony with the water, take from it what is required to survive and never contemplate a life beyond the boundaries of Aathi. The water of Aathi allows them to be a part of the ecosystem. Sarah Joseph alludes to a cosmic unity by depicting a lagoon that is both self-sustaining and self-regulating. She presents the water- life in Aathi as an example of this integral and primordial vision. It is the symbol of fertility, vitality and sustainability. Through the biblical reference, water is presented as the source of life in Aathi: “Hagar could understand the thirst of a people, the infinite value of water and the secret of life scripted into it ... But you must know that water is life itself” (14). Even the elements of nature are personified as living beings with “The hill had a soul. The earth was the clothing of the soul” (213) and the wind carrying the smell of breast milk. For Sarah Joseph, nature seeps into the culture of the land of Aathi and forms a sustainable narrative for human stories to prosper.

Patrick Curry rightly states that “The only sustainable human culture is the one based on ecological sustainability” (267). He further suggests that “an ecocentric ethic at its best is pluralist and pragmatic, post-secular in an animist way, and part of a programme of green citizenship that also draws on ... traditional ecological knowledge” (268). Sarah Joseph does seem to believe in this idea and has created a narrative that is culturally grounded and ecologically-centred with a purpose to dwell upon an indigenous ecological ethic that is pluralistic and sustainable. The narrative issues an eco-warning and alludes to a dystopia towards which the human race is mindlessly marching.

To suffice, the ecocidal warning issued by the novelist gives a clarion call to the

humanity to understand the gravity of the situation and re-iterate the role of indigenous land ethic in providing the solution to the problem of environmental degradation. Moreover, the narrative appeals for a collective effort towards addressing the problem of environmental degradation seriously.

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## Techniques to Improve English Communication for Enhancing Employability of Non-Native Speakers

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### *Abstract*

*English proficiency is one of the most desired skills for employment in 21<sup>st</sup> century worldwide, and its mastery leads to better job opportunities and career growth for Indians. English is considered as a unique academic asset not only as a language but also as a skill-valued aid. National Knowledge Commission in its 2007 recommendations stated, 'English language is a critical determinant of access to, and opportunities for a better life.' Globalization and free market economies encourage the use of English and it is progressively gaining more acceptance worldwide. Most of the internal and external communications in majority of the organizations are conducted in English. Therefore, the one who has a good knowledge of speaking and writing of English, bears a higher rate of success in securing a good employability. A good knowledge of a subject is required for applying for a post to successfully getting through the interviews. Well written concise curriculum vitae helps a candidate in getting himself short-listed for the interview. Good presentation skills and mastery over spoken English help him to secure the position. It has been observed that interview panels prefer those candidates who could seamlessly express themselves in English. This observation is not limited only to the high ranked jobs like Government administrative jobs, UPSC, bank Probationary officers, Combined Defense Services or aviation industries alone but also for low profile jobs like call center jobs, receptionists or the helpers. The present research paper aims at highlighting the methods and processes which are immensely helpful for a learner to achieve a better proficiency in English language.*

*Keywords: English proficiency, employability, corporate, English communication*

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### **Introduction**

English is a global language. It is spoken and understood in 146 countries in the world ("What is the most...", n.d.). Therefore, English makes it extremely convenient to communicate any official information or preparing business documents or passing

information to a larger part of professional bodies as well as community. The historic reason for this much acceptance of English, is the rule by the British over almost every part of the globe during 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century. Being the language of rulers, English earned respect and the British people made every effort for its spread in every country, they ruled. They ensured that at least the most skilled administrators and their nearest groups use it. Their motive was to create a system in every country, which was not only devoted and loyal to them but that the people should also feel themselves as an elite group that was more inclined towards their rulers and not to the subjects. This separation of mindsets between administrators and common people, made easy for them to rule with minimum presence of British people. The luxurious life style of this new elite group started a race among common people to learn and use English as much as they could. Above all, they felt proud and special while speaking English, as it was the language of rulers.

During their rule, British colonized every continent, exploited all their natural resources, human resources, wealth, antiques, crafts, precious metals, stones and gems, and sent these valuables to Britain. It made Britain the richest country in the world that time. Later on, after Second World War, many countries became independent but they were economically fragile. To sustain their economy and start the development from the scratch, they had to start business either with their neighbors or with those countries that had mutual interests. One big hindrance was the lack of one common language. To overcome this problem most of the developing countries adopted English to come on a common platform. English served as a common tool of communication among these countries. This trend went on growing from strength to strength with the passage of time to an extent that in contemporary times, no one can imagine to substitute English with any other language.

#### **Relation between English expertise and employability:**

As mentioned above for any kind of education, economic activity, trade, administration; besides the core knowledge of specific trade, an excellent command over written and spoken English is necessary. Not only the leaders require it but their teams require it as well. It helps them to develop an understanding about the facts and figures, carrying out discussions, making strategies, work plans; progress assessments, critical analysis and implementing required amendments. Employability is the ability to get a job according to one's professional skills and to remain employable due to the relevant expertise. Therefore, the employers always look for an employee who has proficiency in English. Although, a better proficiency helps in getting a good employment opportunity but this is not easy to achieve for a person having another language as a mother tongue. It is difficult to be as confident and as well versed in a foreign language as one feels while speaking one's mother tongue. However, English, as a universal language has opened the new doors of opportunities for each individual.

Globalization compels the domestic companies to think beyond the boundaries of nations. People are comfortable taking fruitful overseas assignments these days. As English is used as a universal medium of communication in most of the countries, language is hardly a barrier for people who intend to work for the assignments in other countries. The



BPO sector of India has an edge over other countries because Indians speak fairly better English compared to other non-native English speakers. It is equally applicable to our IT sector as well. Wherever, a large English speaking population exists, it makes easier for MNCs and foreign entrepreneurs to do their business there. English proficiency is an important employability skill required for employment as well as to move higher in one's professional career.

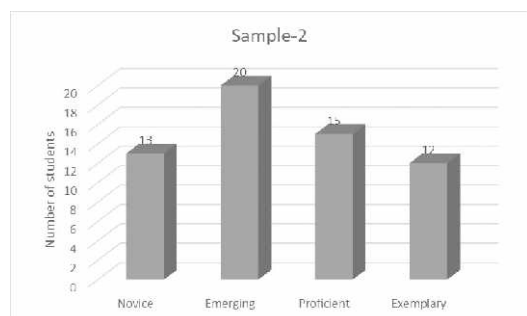
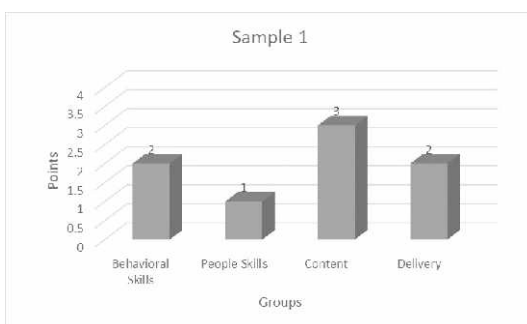
Generally, the employers feel that our current education system fails to provide market ready professionals because during the recruitment interviews the performance of most of the candidates is not up-to the desired level. A research published in 2018 says that only 5% to 6% technical graduates achieve the academic level from where the market can mold them to become a good professional ("94% of engineering graduates", n.d.). This is true about their English skills as well. The students cannot use correct tenses or prepositions while speaking. In many cases, the students turn up as taciturn. Besides lacking in speaking skills, they also fail to draft any official documents e.g. letters, emails, instructions, memos, project reports, and notices etc. In current times, job responsibilities are in the form of an array of different tasks. An employee has to be a good presenter, a good negotiator, a good leader, a good strategic planner simultaneously. Employees with good English proficiency handle most of the tasks comfortably. On the other hand, those who are not good at English, generally fail to manage the show that effectively. The research works of various research groups have also highlighted the need of good communication skills in a suitable employee. A study by Gregorio et al. (2019) about the important employability skills for future marketing professionals highlights five employability skill categories and twenty-nine skills and capabilities. Efficient communication skill is one of them. Another study by Newnam and Goodebec (2019) emphasizes on the positive benefits of good communication practices in the workplace. All communications were categorized in three categories a) task related communication, b) relationship related communication and c) safety related communication. Erickson (2015) studied a relation between communication and employee retention. He concluded that besides other factors, the employee should be committed to the ongoing learning and professional development as well as improving communication skills. Cissna and Carter (1982) concluded that a competent communicator only, wins a communication situation in which skill in communication is the important determinant of success. Roy and Leonard (1998) summarized the results focused on the job interview, social skills training for Asian-American immigrants and its role in getting higher level of employment. In a repeated measures multiple baseline design, comparison of pre-and post-performance measures of social interview skills found improvement in participants' performance. Social validity measures indicated self-improvement in several dimensions including understanding of social customs, personal confidence, and securing better employment. Steve and Stevina (2011) explored the dimensions of influential factors and employment interview from the recruiters' perspective in hiring new college graduates for an entry-level position. The study suggests that there are six dimensions of influential communication factors in employment interviews.

The above studies emphasize that the good communication skills are the basic

competency required in a would be employee. Therefore, one must work aggressively on improving one's communication skills. This manuscript emphasizes on the techniques, found most helpful for the learners, to improve English proficiency.

### Methodology:

The above findings suggest framing a well-planned strategy for improving English proficiency of a beginner. Our strategy tries ; a. To identify the shortcomings in the students in the subject, b. provide them support in their weak areas c. to get their feedback about the effectiveness of these support methods, once the course is over. In the beginning of the semester, before starting the regular teaching, a survey is conducted with an objective to identify the weak subject areas of the students. The survey is composed of ten questions categorized in four groups, namely behavioral skills, people skills, content and delivery. These questions are framed to analyze the existing level of English proficiency of the students. Behavioral skills group contains two questions based on managing self and time, and assertive behavior and problem solving capability. The second group is people skill i.e. demonstration of a high level of cultural and social understanding and respect for the uniqueness of others. Third group i.e. content, includes purpose, planning and organization and language. While in delivery group, the body language, language competency, time management and proxemics are evaluated. There are set of evaluation rubrics for each question, which are discussed with the students before they start answering the questions. The students provide the responses (Fig. 1) at the scale of 1-4 where 1 is for novice, 2 is for emerging, 3 is for proficient, 4 is for exemplary. Fig. 1 exhibits the response of a specific student for these four groups, mentioned above, while Fig. 2 shows the response of all the students for a specific group. Based on the analytical results of this survey, student groups are formed (Fig. 2) and they are exposed to more number of exercises, focused on that specific shortcoming. In general, the students' performance becomes better due to the regular practice. On the completion of the course, the students' feedback is taken again about the techniques used for improving their English proficiency. The most helpful and appreciated techniques, are summarized in the following section. We believe that these will surely help improving English proficiency of any learner.



## **Skills needed to enhance English proficiency:**

### **1. Be with similar aspirants:**

A beginner to English language should always seek the company of those with same aspiration being a member of the group having a common goal i.e. converging them into good communicator will certainly help the aspirant. The studies by Cen and Ruta (2014) and Haque (2015) indicate that the group learning with efficient collaboration learning patterns improves students' performance comparing to learning alone. It is always convenient to share new learning among the group of people having similar orientation. He will certainly get suggestions for further improvements, which will enhance the quality of learning. This process is not one way. Every individual in a group gets the benefits of this exchange of views. They will also learn indirect qualities of a good employee, for example, a patient listener putting forward opinions defending from a criticism etc.

### **2. Develop good listening skills**

Listening is one of the most important skills to become a language expert. Speaking, writing and reading skills are dependent on listening skill of an individual. This is the first skill, which a baby starts learning and mastering while it is in the womb of the mother. It is obvious that listening is the first step of the speaking. Afterwards a person starts reading and writing. Repeating and practicing, what one listens, is what can make one a good speaker. There are BECK practice tests designed by Cambridge to enhance the listening skill of the user. Astorga (2015) examined the relationship between learning proficiency and speaking improvement and reported that the better listening skills support to improve oral skills in English.

### **3. Learning Phonetics**

While speaking, the words must be spoken in an appropriate way so that a native speaker should understand it properly. Phonetics is important not only for the scientists, engineers or researchers but also for anyone who either teaches or learns a foreign language. One of the most important applications of phonetics is that it enables to spell out words in correct accent. It also enables learners to better understand and speak the language they are learning. Phonetics is the method that teaches the speaker to speak the words correctly and without the influence of the local accent. Correct use of phonetics makes the speech of an individual understandable to everyone. In his book chapter entitled "Phonetics: Precursors to modern approaches" in the book, *Concise History of Language Sciences*, Kemp (1995) has emphasized the importance of phonetics in better English communication. This is a scientific approach, which helps us to modify our speech organs to speak English in the most acceptable way.

#### **4. Get involved in group discussion:**

Group discussions are needed to sharpen the skills of thinking process as well as speaking skills. To start with, it is not necessary to have a large group. One could start rehearsing by doing discussion with one's roommates, colleagues, friends by initially picking up simpler topics for a small period. Later on, as the process of mastering thoughts becomes better synchronized, time duration may be extended and complex topics may be picked up for discussions. It is important that learner should also work on enriching his subject knowledge so that he may support his statements with concrete facts at the time of discussion. A conversation-analytic study by Frantisek Tuma (2018) focuses on discussion quality improvement techniques, and shows how to improve the clarity or accuracy of the discussion, or how space can be created for audience participation by inviting audience questions during the discussion.

This practice provides a suitable environment for the learner to overcome hesitations and for implementation of the things, he learnt since the beginning of the language learning process. These discussions also make one more expressive in different situations, a better presenter and negotiator.

#### **5. Effective Reading skills:**

Reading is also an important skill to communicate the information which are written somewhere in the form of a document. It is extremely important to communicate the text along with all the punctuations so that it can transfer the exact meaning to the listener. The learner can acquire better reading skills if he develops a habit to write a summary about what he read. He must try to present his thoughts in a streamlined manner so that the core content of the read material is presented adequately and completely. A work by Malgorzata Marzec-Stawiarska (2016) exhibited the relation between the development of the students' reading skills by assessing their level of comprehension before and after an EFL course involving summary writing. The study showed a statistically significant improvement in the reading skills of the group of the summary writers. Also, practicing reading of different kinds of the documents helps a lot in improving the style of speaking.

#### **6. Building blocks of Vocabulary and grammar:**

Sentence formation is the one highly important element of any language. A wrongly framed sentence leaves an adverse impression on the listener. Although, the facts may be correct yet if the communication is full of grammatical errors, the credibility of the entire information loses its weight. Therefore, a thorough knowledge about tenses, prepositions, adverbs is essential to speak English in the desired manner. Similarly, vocabulary also adds value to the quality of the speech and it enhances the effect of communication. Reчек et. al. (2019) tested the

hypothesis that people make judgments about others' personality traits – particularly those desired by employers – on the basis of their written grammar usage. Participants who read a letter that contained grammar usage errors downgraded the applicant's writing as well as their standing on personality traits such as capable, hard-working, and team-oriented. The effects were consistent and imply that people should attend to their grammar usage, if they want to make a positive first impression. The thumb rule is; better the vocabulary and grammar, better the communicator.

#### **7. Develop and practice writing:**

Writing is the most tedious skill to master. The knowledge of listening, as well as reading is required to write something in a way that it carries the same meaning for which it was written. The complete use of the vocabulary, grammar, punctuations, framing of sentences, active and passive voices, direct and indirect speeches, exclamations, figures of speech, use of proverbs etc. are required to write something meaningful. It requires much effort. Abigail B. Calkin (2018) demonstrated that the process of writing (generating new ideas, thinking about writing) and the products (words written, edits made) are dependent on the precise use of grammar and can be analyzed behaviourally. This study involved high school level students. One should consult with the peers for its correctness and suitability after writing something. Immense improvement may be observed in the writing skills if one keeps on doing this practice.

#### **8. Nurture presentation skill:**

Presentation helps the learner to organize and provide straightforward statements. By presentation, one could inform, persuade, motivate and sometimes entertain. It is a skill and one could have mastery on it only by actually presenting oneself before a group of people. One could learn to begin a presentation by capturing the listener's attention. This skill helps to synchronize thoughts so that the interest of the audience is maintained throughout the entire oral presentation. Presenter should be well aware of the purpose and should know the trail of sequences he has followed then only, the presentation becomes interesting and helps motivate the audience to listen and provide an effective feedback at the end of it. The feedback and assessment plays an important role in teaching and learning of the oral presentation skills (Grez, 2010) The one who practices presentations, learns to speak with confidence and clarity, nervousness is replaced by excitement; he learns to talk more rather than just reading text from the slides. He learns to take pauses and relax, that helps him to connect to his content more, eventually helping him to use less word fillers. Having mastery on presentation is an invaluable experience. To make a start a small group discussion of one's interest is

recommended.

### **9. Attending workshops:**

Workshops are the teaching-learning activities, which are organized for the interaction of peers with the learners. The motive of these workshops is to disseminate knowledge about the chosen topic to the group. These are usually two-way communication where first, the peers share the basics and advances about the topic with the learners and then the outcome is assessed by involving the group in some exercises. Finally, an evaluation is carried out and certificates are provided to the successful individual members of the learning group. These workshops are of great help as these provide not only the theoretical advances of the topic to the learners but also provide practical exposure to them. This combination of both the teaching modalities sharpens the communication skills of the learner. Besides, these provide expert tips for effectively improving one's communication with coworkers and clients. Bylund et. al. (2018) studied the effect of workshop for training faculty to facilitate small group role play sessions for a communication skills training programme and assess the impact of that workshop on the trainees' self-efficacy about facilitation skills. The workshop had a significant effect on participants' self-efficacy in facilitating communication skills training. At least 75% of participants reported feeling comfortable facilitating communication skills training small groups.

### **10. Online course:**

The most recent development in the field of learning of English communication is online learning. A number of software are available in the market to teach the learner. These courses are most useful for the learners who do not have time to attend the face-to-face classes. This may be due to their job hours clashing with the class time or so. One can run the course content at any time in a day and start learning. These courses also have practice tool as well as the assessment tools. Learner can discuss his difficulties at any point of time with the instructor and usually these are solved promptly. In their investigation, Gillani and Eynon (2014) concluded that massively open online courses (MOOCs) play an extremely important role in higher education, empirical research that explores the realities of interacting and learning in these communication courses.

### **Conclusion**

All the above-mentioned methods are the combination of traditional as well as the recent tools for English learning. All of them have the potential to improve the English proficiency of the learner. By practicing these methods along with an urge to learn; the listening, reading, speaking and writing ability of anyone is bound to improve. With better English communication skills, there are much better chances for one to get an employment. Besides getting an employment, the employee gets priority in upward professional growth and earns respect in his team.

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## **Adaptability of Google Classroom for Enhancement of the Language Proficiency of Rural Engineering Students**

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### *Abstract*

*This paper focuses on the adaptability of Google classroom teaching for the enhancement of the performance of the students' English proficiency in technical institution. The study has been conducted in the Government Engineering College, Haveri, Karnataka, with a sample size of hundred students of two branches of engineering. The concept of Preposition has been delivered to the students in both conventional and Google classroom methods. The performance of the students is evaluated by the brain storming, tests and other assessment Medias. The performance index has been set and the level of improvement has been noted. From the study it was found that there is a drastic improvement in the students' performance indices with induct of the Google classroom method. The study has also focused on the assessment of the adaptability of Google Apps for Education (GAPE) by rural/urban, male/female and Kannada/English medium samples exclusively. Moreover, the study revealed that the rural Kannada medium samples, that too the female samples have shown much improvement in Google classroom.*

*Keywords: Google Apps for Education (GAPE), English Proficiency, Engineering Students, Rural Background, Medium of study, Conventional Teaching, Google Classroom, Brain Storming, Performance Index.*

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### **Introduction**

The Communication skills, subject grasping ability and the way of expressing the subjects, has become the most essential quality of a graduate engineer. In the recent past this has grabbed the attention of many academicians and researchers. Now a days the Communicative competence is dominating target of teaching a foreign language. As an instrument of collaboration and interaction in modern society, the English language

performs the function of communication, Education and self-education, being. The practical usage of the language lies in the fact that it's a means of introduction to the world culture, but also a mandatory skill to achieve competency efficient and necessary in the labor market. In business scenario of today's environment, the employees are expected to possess communicative skills to be able to compete globally. the academic "education should train the students capable of working in the real circumstances of professional environments. This is exposed to the language skills even if their future profession is not directly connected with linguistics, translation or teaching foreign languages" (Natalia Nikolaevna Bobyreva, 2014).

In the present academic scenario with the advent of new tools and technologies of teaching, the teaching learning process has become more flexible, attractive, attainable and effective. The medium of visual technology has several advantages, among them are; attract the interest of the students, increase students' attention to provide reliable and solid data, complete information and assist data interpretation. Learning technologies can also motivate students to study and stimulate in them the desire to learn. Technology can also bring about a sense of ease and joy among the students and renew their spirits, with this sense for ease and high-level motivation, learning class can be more effective, innovative and communicative and consequently, strengthen learning ability of the students. "Indeed, technology cannot totally replace existing conventional methods, but it is deemed required to realize desired goals" (Zaid, 2011).

Some researchers have worked on the concept of edutainment, a term coined by Robert Heyman. Colace states that, "edutainment is described as a type of entertainment which is designed with the aim to educate by including entertainment variety such as multimedia software, internet sites, music, films, videos, computer games and Television" (Colace 2006). The Google class-room is one such edutainment tool which is used by a large group of faculties to teach students. Google Classroom is identified as one of the best learning forums to share learning materials with the students. Google Classroom is a free online tool for teachers and students. Teachers can conduct class, then prepare and assign assignments. The Google Classroom enables the students and teachers discuss about the assignments and teachers can track the student's progress. It allows students to post their answers and comments to the assigned tasks. Faculties can share audio-video files with the students, create assignments, pose questions, post relevant content, and motivate students to learn through Google Classroom. In addition, this tool enhances students' interaction.

Google Classroom is given access from any computer using Google Chrome or from any android device irrespective of platform. The worksheets or the files are stored in a folder on Google Drive. Google Classroom can be accessed anytime, anywhere. Users need not to worry about crashed computers. Exposure to Google Classroom help students to upgrade themselves to other learning management systems used in higher education. The classroom is a huge time saver. Access to google class room saves time as it can be logged in anytime and anywhere. Since Classroom can be accessed from any android device, teachers and

students can work and learn through their phones or tablets. Communication with students and parents is made ease by the built-in tools. Teachers and students can communicate via e-mail, discuss and provide feedback on work. Teachers control the activities of students in Google class-room

Many works have been carried out on the performance studies of the students (Both technical and non-technical) by considering the usage and non-usage of the advanced teaching –learning tools and techniques. A very less amount of work has been documented with respect to the grasping ability of students with varied regions, background, mental ability, medium of instructions, etc., This reveals that there is a further scope to carry out a work on the aforementioned areas.

### Methodology

In order to understand and analyze the effectiveness of modern teaching, learning tools and techniques the study has been carried out by the students of the Government Engineering College, Haveri, Karnataka. A sufficient amount of data on the learning and grasping ability of these students has been collected.

Collection of this data has been made under two modes of teaching, viz, conventional mode of teaching and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) mode. For the ease of analysis, the comparison of the change in performance of the students has been made with respect to conventional mode of teaching and the Google class-room. Further, to have a precise analysis the study has been stipulated to a single concept, 'preposition' in English grammar.

The concept of 'Preposition' was explained to the students in the classrooms using many examples which can convey the meaning of the word used and also the category to which it belongs along with its function.

### At / in and to

#### i. The difference

*On* and *in* are generally used for the position; *two* is used for movement or direction. Compare:

- He works **at** the market.
- He gets **to** at the market by bike.
- My father lives **in** Canada.
- I go **to** Canada to see him whenever I can

#### ii. Expressions of purpose

If we mention the purpose of a movement before we mention the destination, we usually use *at/in* before the place. Compare:

- Let's go **to** Marcel's for coffee.
- Let's go and have coffee **at** Marecel's.
- (NOT Let's go and have coffee to Marecel's.)
- I went **to** Canada to see my father.
- I went to see my father **in** Canada.

(NOT *I went to see my father to Canada.*)

### iii. Targets

After some verbs, *at* is used to indicate the 'target' of a perception of non-verbal communication. Common examples are *look, Smile, wave, frown, point.*

*Why are you **looking at** her like that?*

*Because she **smiled at** me.*

*At* is also used after some verbs referring to attacks of aggressive behavior.

Common examples are *shoot, laugh, throw and shout.*

*It's a strange feeling to have somebody **shoot at** you.*

*If you can't **laugh at** yourself, who can you **laugh at**?*

*Stop **throwing** stones **at** the cat, darling.*

*You don't need to **shout at** me.*

*Throw to* and *shout to* are used when there is no idea of attack.

*Please do not **throw** food **to** the animals.*

*Could you **shout to** Phil and tell him it's breakfast time?*

*Arrive* is generally followed by *at* or *in*: never by *to*.

*We should arrive **at** pat's in time for lunch. (NOT..... **arrive to** Pat's...)*

*When did you arrive **in** New Zealand? (NOT.... **to** New Zealand?)* (Michael Swan, 2000)

The above concept has been delivered through Google classroom, which is one of the prominent modes of ICT .Using Google classroom as a tool for teaching ,the concept of preposition as ascertained by many grammarians was taught with many illustrative examples and also with their web links. Through Google classroom, different learning resources of many experts were provided. Many videos of the same with understandable language and accent was given. Many pictorial illustrations were also given in support of these documents and videos on prepositions; this clearly indicates that ICT is playing a key role in the present education system which is a supporting system to traditional classroom teaching.

Finally a group of 100 samples comprising of Electronic and communication engineering and Computer science engineering branch were selected for the data acquisition and analysis. From the data obtained the analysis of the students' performance has been made and the suitable remedies have been derived. The detail of the results with the relevant interpretations has been given in the successive section.

## Results and Discussions

Heggart's study "showed that Google Classroom increased student participation and learning and improved classroom dynamics. It also revealed concerns around pace and user experience" (1). Data for this study was collected during the odd semester at Government Engineering College, Haveri, affiliated to Visvesvaraya Technological University, Belagavi, Karnataka, as part of the regular activities of Technical English course. The course was taught by the author of this paper. The latest regulations of All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE) has outlined this course as mandatory subject for the professional engineers. In view of this an attempt has been made in this study to understand the

capabilities of the professional students in language proficiency and the adoption ability to the recent information technology tools.

There is nothing new about the benefits of ICT in education, especially in higher education. Most of the discussions state that the potential benefits of ICT-based teaching and learning strategies, based on the following two propositions: (1) ICT offers economical efficiency for the organization of education and the academic community, (2) ICT is able to generalize students, enabling the institution to accommodate individual differences such as goal learning, teaching style, comfort learning for both students or university anytime and anywhere (Massy and Zemsky 1995, Pavlik 1998). In the past few years, flipped teaching has become one of the most popular teaching trends being adopted. Yet, there is a lack of data on what students use and find useful while taking these classes (Tana Mzoughi 2015).

Google classroom is one such prominent tool used as a teaching aid in this study. The results have been collected in the form of tests and assignments, both in classroom teaching and Google classroom. The degree of learning is indicated by language proficiency, knowledge, attitude and behavior towards information and technology. Low language proficiency, less knowledge about Google Classroom, treating Google classroom as unimportant not using the tool to learn the concept given, here 'prepositions' are used as indicators to indicate degree of learning through Google Classroom.

Celce Murcia (2001), has identified three types of problems among non-native speakers of English while using prepositions: choosing the wrong prepositions, omitting a needed preposition and using an extra where one is not required. At the same time instructors are also reluctant to teach or explain prepositions. Delija's research (2013) finds that "Most of the teachers felt that English prepositions are difficult to teach to nonnative speakers, for many reasons: 1. Polysemy of prepositions . . . 2. lack of a spoken and written guide . . . 3. native language interference" (1). The present research has concentrated not to arise any of these difficulties in the teaching and learning experience.

Figure 1, depicts the number of samples chosen for the study and their gender and background. Since the college is situated in the backward rural area, 67% of the samples were from rural back ground. Furthermore, the study has focused on the students of Electronics and Communication Engineering and Computer Science Engineering, the female sample size of 70% is dominating over male sample size of 30%

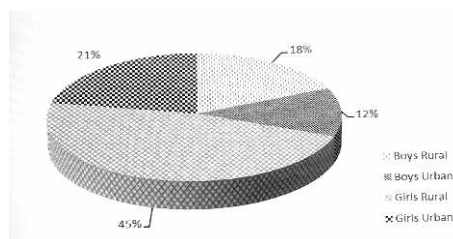


Figure 1. Gender and Background of the samples of study

From the figure 1, it can also be observed the students belonging to the rural background are more. A brain storming session has also been held with these students to know their family background, their economic status, qualification of their parents etc. These factors of their background have influenced much on their lifestyle and professionalism.

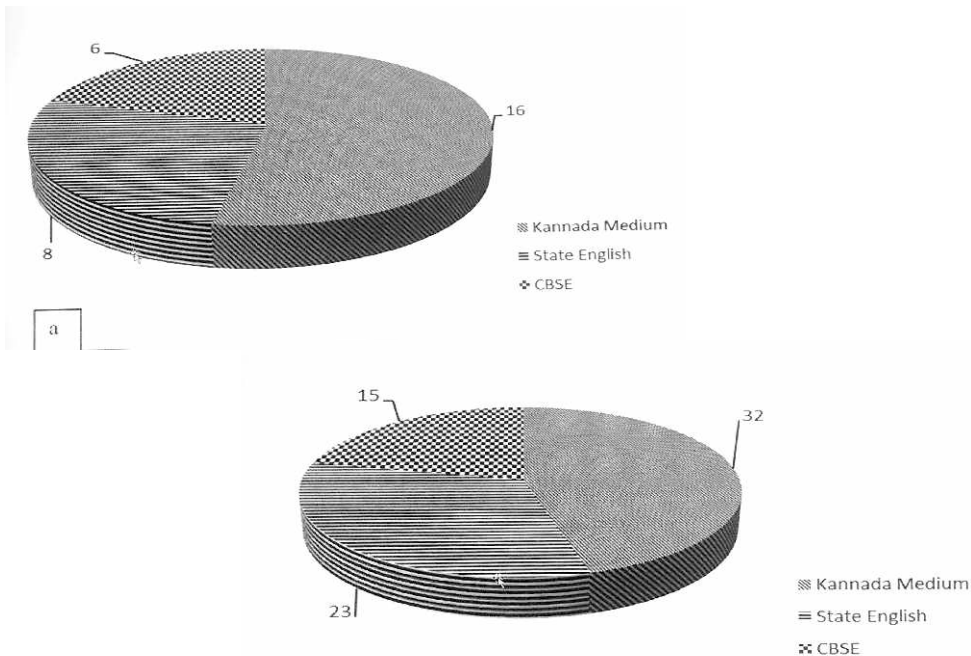


Figure 2. Medium/Board of learning of the samples till 12<sup>th</sup> standard a) Boys, b) Girls.

As can be seen from the figure 2, amongst the chosen 100 samples, 48% of the students belong to Kannada medium, this is mainly because of their background as enumerated earlier. The percentage of students studied in state English medium is 31% and that of in central board is 21%. Since the area is located in the rural sector, the students studied in Kannada medium hold a major share in the class. In the recent past the establishment of convent schools in the rural vicinity has given scope for some students to study in English medium. Because of the limitations prevailing in the rural areas to reach the central board schools, a very less number of students are into the CBSE. Based on the brain storming sessions conducted it is found that the students studied in Kannada medium are strong in analyzing and digesting the concept. Whereas English medium students of state Board and CBSE Board are good in grasping the concept.

For the aforementioned group of students, the concept of preposition has been delivered through conventional method of teaching and also through Google classroom. To determine their proficiency levels, tests have been conducted in both modes. The performance of the students has been rated with performance indices poor, average, good and excellent, by keeping the yardstick of their marks secured. Figure 3 emphasizes the comparative analysis on the effectiveness of the nature of delivery, especially for the male samples. It was found that around 14 students (46%) are in poor performance index and only one student (3%) is in the excellent index. The same with respect to the Google classroom has improved, that is, the students with poor performance index have come down to 8 (57%

decreased). Whereas, the performance index of students with excellent grade has increased with 3 (300% increment). This has very clearly revealed the impact of the Google classroom on the enhancement of the language proficiency of the students.

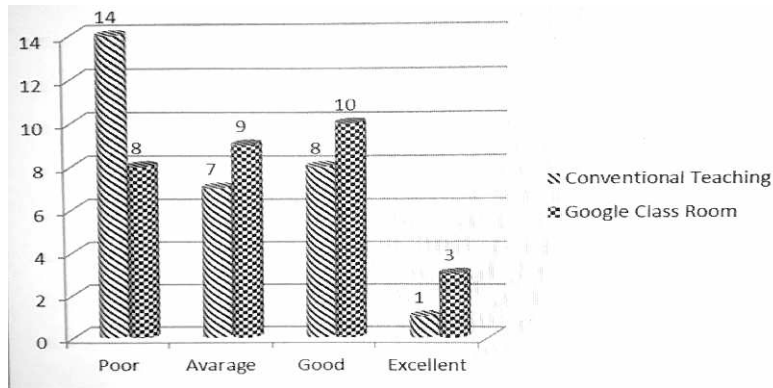


Figure 3. Comparative study of the conventional and Google classroom methods for male samples.

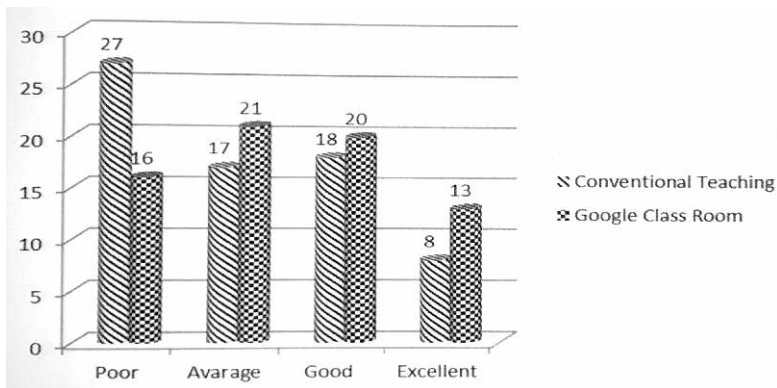


Figure 4. Comparative study of the conventional and Google classroom methods for female samples.

Similar study has been made for the female students, the results of which have been shown in the figure 4. This has also shown the same trend as that of the male students. But it was observed that the improvement coefficient in case of female samples is far higher than the male samples. The shift from 27 poor indexed students has reduced to 16 and students with excellent index have risen from 8 to 13, with Google classroom. This has shown the effectiveness of the Google classroom system. Further detailed analysis of the results has shown that the improvement coefficient of the Kannada medium and female samples is found to be high. This might be because of their keen interest and hard work afford to learn new things.

**Conclusions**

Based on the results and the discussions made on the comparative study conducted for the

adaptability of the Google classroom method on rural and urban samples of various back grounds, the following conclusions were derived.

- The Google classroom has enhanced the learning capabilities of the students who range from fast learner, average learner to slow learner.
- The Google classroom has provided a platform for the students to view and review, learn and relearn the concept at their own pace and in accordance to their individual interest, needs and cognitive processes.
- Google classroom has made it possible for the students to acquire knowledge through, open and flexible strategies of ICT. Distributed learning has been made possible by the Google classroom.
- It has also been found that, if taught with Google classroom technique the students of rural background, especially the female samples will have higher level of improvisation in their language proficiency.

Finally, it can be stated that, learning anytime, anywhere with synchronous and asynchronous communication across space, time and pace is made possible by the Google classroom. Google classroom is not a substitute for traditional method of teaching but, a tool to support traditional way of teaching. While technological expansions are very high it is necessary to keep on renovating pedagogical practices. It helps instructors to be more self-reflexive and passionate about use of technology especially when the topics are disinteresting.

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## Reading, Understanding and Teaching Text in the Age of Digital Technology

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### *Abstract*

*The aim of this paper is to evaluate the place of the 'reader' particularly in the shift from the 'print' to the 'digital.' There is an undeniable tension, which cannot be ignored, particularly regarding the reader: like a 'traditional' reader, who reads printed books, a 'reader' who oscillates between the traditional and digital literature and the 'digital' reader. This paper seeks to address the reader who oscillates between the two forms, and tries to grapple with this shift from the print to the digital. In addition, one of the main arguments in cultural theory today is that the transition from what is described as a closed print-based culture to an open digital culture is part of a broader shift in how culture is produced and consumed.*

*Keywords: digital text, digitalized literature, e-literature.*

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### **Introduction**

In the age of digitalization reading, teaching, and understanding of literature is also deeply affected by the digital innovations in the field of classroom teaching. To comprehend the shift from 'traditional' to 'digital' literature, it is important to define these two forms of 'literature.' Printed book, or simply book, unlike digital literature, is described in the Merriam Webster Dictionary as “a collection of written or printed or blank sheets fastened together along one edge . . .” or “something felt to be a source of enlightenment or instruction.” Digital literature, or electronic literature as Katherine Hayles defines, is generally considered to exclude print literature that has been digitized, is by contrast “digital born,” a first generation digital object, created on a computer, and meant to be read on the computer (Hayles: 3).

### **Digital versus Printed Text**

It must be noted that digital literature follows more than five hundred years of print literature and the consumers or 'readers' of digital texts come to e-texts with expectations and the ideas formulated by the print media or the print world. Therefore, this transition to the digital, as Hayles observes again, is where e-literature must build on even to modify, transform, and also to 'subvert' the traditional form of literature” (Hayles: 5). Another facet of books as well as digital literature which cannot be overlooked is that both are produced, marketed and read in a particular contemporary culture and that, as Karl Marx noted, the

'material' facts of a society determines its culture—arts, music, philosophy, religion, and of course, literature. This brings us to the crucial juncture between the dying tradition of 'print' and the 'upcoming' form of digital literature, and how we deal with this shift between the two.

With the transition from literature to cultural studies, our 'texts' are no longer limited to words alone, but anything and everything that is audio-visual. That brings us to the challenges of using multimedia texts which we might develop, or use those available on the Internet. A substantial change of medium to e-text took place close to 50 years ago. E-texts, or electronic documents, have been around since long before the Internet, the Web, and specialised E-book reading software. Fr. Roberto Busa, an Italian Jesuit, began developing an electronic edition of Thomas Aquinas (*Index Thomisticus*) in the 1940s, while large-scale electronic text editing, hypertext and online reading platforms such as Augment and File Retrieval and Editing SyStem (FRESS), appeared in the 1960s. Michael Hart posted the Declaration of Independence as Project Gutenberg's first document on 1 December 1971, and by 1989, it had posted its 10<sup>th</sup> e-book. The pace was rapid after OCR systems were developed and distributed and proofreading was initiated. As of 3 October 2015, Project Gutenberg reached 50,000 items in its collection. Over 1,00,000 free e-books are available through its partners, affiliates and resources. Entire courses in literature have been made possible as the primary texts which can be sourced from Project Gutenberg.

### Digital Revolution in Classroom Teaching

Meanwhile, in the 1980s, the CD-ROM revolution permitted reference books to move to electronic editions, with the *Grolier Encyclopaedia* published in 1985. This version had music and short stories in it. The Oxford English Dictionary was available on CDs in 1989. By 1994, Doring Kindersley published a range of interactive multimedia titles. The 1980s also saw the launch of computer adventure games based on stories as *The Hobbit* (1982), through which the user progressed by typing in instructions. Poet Robert Pinsky brought out *Mindwheel* in 1984, an interactive fiction game that is explicitly labelled an 'electronic novel,' the first print publication sold in large quantities in an electronic edition.

Amazon revolutionised the e-reading industry with the introduction of its devices. The Kindle keeps company with Nook and Kobo besides many other e-book readers. However, these devices often limit the content that can be read on them. The production of e-books fuelled the sales of these devices but in terms of volume, only 20 percent of books are read as e-books. However, students are increasingly turning to digital devices to carry their texts or listen to the audio versions. There is a need to distinguish between digitalised literature and the newer digital literature. A digitised work is likely to have been created for another medium such as print but made accessible through a digital medium. On the other hand, electronic literature, or E-lit, refers to works with important literary aspects that take advantage of the capabilities and contexts provided by the stand-alone or networked computer. They are works created exclusively on and for digital devices. Therefore, in a world of digital artefacts, as Marlene Manoff says, “. . . textual scholars may consider a whole new range of physical objects and processes, including platforms, interfaces, standards, and coding . . . ” (Manoff, 312). Due to these chances the pedagogy to read

literature has also changed as Landow says, “we must abandon conceptual systems founded upon the idea of the centre, margin, hierarchy, and linearity and replace them with ones of multilinearity, nodes, links and nodes and networks” (Wilkie:125).

According to the works of prominent literary and cultural theorists working within digital textual studies, such as N. Katherine Hayles (*Writing Machines*), Avital Ronell (*The Telephone Book*), George P. Landow (*Hypertext 3.0*), Alan Liu (*The Laws of Cool*), and Jerome McGann (*Radiant Textuality*), the digital text means nothing less than a fundamental transformation in the very structure of social life, requiring a move from an analytics of *depth* to a post-analytic play of *surfaces* that complicates all binary relations, including the relation between writer and reader, past and present, inside and outside, production and consumption. For example, Alan Kirby writes in *Digimodernism* that the digital text represents “a new form of textuality characterized in its purest instances by onwardness, haphazardness, evanescence, and anonymous, social, and multiple authorship” (Wilkie:125) such that what he declares “digimodernism” goes beyond postmodernism in denying the relevance of history. Kirby writes that whereas postmodernism “emphasized a new sense of history construed in the present” the “apparently real and digimodernism are by contrast lost in the here and now, swamped in the textual present; they know nothing of the cultural past and have no historical sense” (Wilkie:125).

The emergence of the digital text is said to represent a turn away from what Derrida describes in *Paper Machine* as “a certain totality” of the book, and what Baudrillard portrays as the referentiality of “the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept,” towards what Peter Lunenfeld outlines in *The Digital Dialectic* as “an era hostile to meta-narratives, a climate that resists the urge to totalize” (Wilkie:125). To put this differently, the digital text is what in the contemporary *resists* conceptualization and exceeds all attempts to finalize the meaning of any narrative. As Samuel Weber writes in describing the “virtuality” of the writings of Walter Benjamin and thus of their relevance to the modern age,

What defines the world in its heterogeneity—divine, human, non-human—is precisely the diversity of translatability, which in turn entails the ability to impart: to partition, to take leave of oneself in order to transpose a part of that self elsewhere, thereby altering it. The world, thus described consists not of a single, continuous medium, nor even of different media that resemble one another, but rather of a network of media whose sole shared trait is the ability to “part with” in imparting. (Wilkie:125)

The digital is understood to be the expression of a culture of surfaces: a culture that is post-historical, post-political and post-analytical and which can no longer be understood as shaped by any meta-narrative of progress, class struggle, or social transformation that is claimed to take place “outside the text.” It is on these terms that the digital text is said to require a new mode of analysis that, according to the editors of *Digital Media Revisited*, is detached from the “grand narrative of modernity,” which means abandoning concepts such

as production, causality, totality, and referentiality when making sense of the text and, instead, embracing a new way of reading in which, “the name of the game is tearing apart and weaving together, decoupling and recoupling, analysing and synthesising, diverging and converging” without appealing to any final or definable outside of the text, whether this outside is the author or reality. As Robert Markley writes, “to historicise and theorize virtual realities...is to enter into a wide-ranging investigation of technology, mathematics, economics, gender politics, and psychology that resists any simple narrative or conceptual closure” (Wilkie:125). In other words, the digital text is taken to be the sign of an *open* culture that resists the *closure* of analysis and critique. It is a culture of tissues, traces, and *ghosts* without any determination.

In the digital age, Lanham argues, it has become impossible to ignore the mediations of the screen. He writes, “when the text moves from page to screen...the digital text becomes unfixed and interactive” (Lanham:143). What this means is that in becoming digital, and thus able to be manipulated endlessly by both reader and writer in ways that the fixity of print supposedly does not allow, the text becomes interminable – there is no longer any final cut and thus no conventional endings, or beginnings, or middles either. As such, we can no longer just “look through” the text. As readers, we are forced to confront the impossibility of moving from the inside of the literary to an understanding of the outside of reality. Instead, Lanham posits that we are to “look at” the text, in its (temporary) manifestation on the screen. It is by looking at the text, rather than projecting an outside through the text, that we have deconstructed the Newtonian world into Pirandello's.

The emergence of a digital text in which the form of scientific understanding of the relation between the outside (reality) and inside (literary) represented by the figure of Newton is blurred and becomes the oscillating, post-referential writings of Luigi Pirandello's *Il Turno* (*The Turn*), and *Suo Marito* (*Her Husband*) mark the beginning of a new era in which the understanding of the relation between the outside (reality) and inside (literary) is blurred. These writings may be seen as a challenge which Richard A. Lanham locates as the foundation of modern society until the digital age when he says, “The center of Western culture since the Renaissance—really since the great Alexandrian editors of Homer—the fixed, authoritative, canonical text, simply disappears into the ether,” (131) which, in turn, means that the definitive and unchangeable text upon which Western humanism has been based since the Renaissance, and the Arnoldian 'masterpiece' theory of culture built upon it, are called into question, put into play.

Lanham proposes a theory of history, which addresses class conflicts, but redefines it as the control over meaning before promising that with the new developments in technology everyone will have the opportunity to redefine the text (and thus take temporary control over the property of the text). This is another name for the spiritualism, which, as Marx argues, is the “inverted consciousness” of an “inverted world.” In other words, it emerges from actual social conflicts – in this case, the conflict over whether digital technologies will be put to use for meeting the needs of all, or whether it will continue to be used destructively in the interests of private accumulation of capital – but turns away from

reality and towards the idea, solving in the realm of the spiritual what can only really be solved by transforming the material reality which produces the contradiction.

The pace at which we are approaching toward a new world, pen and paper would be something that would soon transform into vague traces of the bygone years. The genre of electronic or digital literature is one baby step toward that technological utopia where literature has shaken off the bindings of a page and reached the touch-sensitive screen of iPhones or Kindles. Novels are even written through short messaging service (SMS) and hypertext fiction has evolved as a full-length genre; three-dimensional art installations take place on the web as well as collaborative writing has reached its zenith. Also, with the gradual development of what is known as new media, the literary genre of short stories and poetry have reached a point of renaissance.

Literature has now become a product of the interplay between the graphics and the images that are the most important aspects of new media. This digitalisation is of course an inevitable phenomenon and includes all kinds of literature that is produced with the e-scenario and is primarily suggestive of being read on tablets, e-book readers, laptops, or even mobile phones. Electronic literature has been a subject of various critical attacks with its potential being considered always at a lower grade than that of print literature. However, it can never be forgotten that e-literature has brought forth the essential crux of literature in a manner so palpable to normal taste that people of all classes and of all social standards can be united through this form of literature.

No doubt, many aspects of human lives are determined, controlled, or influenced by technology as technological marvels have initiated and maintained social, economic and cultural changes. Technological progress, including in the field of communication, has encouraged the evolution of digital-born electronic literature. Easily available and portable technology and instantaneous delivery of communication makes possible unprecedented global interaction. Electronic communication greatly facilitates information exchange, and electronic literature is utilised by political and social movements. It has played a major role in the struggle to protect democratic culture, values and traditions. It has led to the formation of alternate global movements with common objectives, thus transcending national, social, cultural, or other frontiers. Mobilization of huge sections of the world's population has become possible.

### **Results**

With the profusion of personal computers, the inclusion of screens and multimedia in everyday textuality, and, most importantly, with the global network linking all of those screens together, writers find that tools that were once cordoned off to other disciplines are now available easily. Poets can now shape poems that move, biographers can now include the voices of their subjects to audio-files, and postmodern fiction writers can literalise post-structuralist notions of preferentiality in their work through hypertext, the time-based aesthetics of film and performance and modes of interactivity once relegated to gaming are also in the domain of writers. The possibilities are endless and increase with each passing year as new tools become available. The digitalization of text has provided a lot of flexibility

to the text and its understanding.

### Conclusion

Literature has undergone an enormous transformation, and there is a corresponding metamorphosis in the pedagogy of reading, understanding and teaching literature in classroom that has transmuted from the oral to the written to the print and now finally to the digital form. With the advent of modern technology, it is possible to store knowledge in the human brain as well as inside technological gadgets and data store clouds, however it's a fact that retrieving information and the attainment of knowledge are two different phenomena. Easy access to information is not equivalent to knowledge gained. Due to developments in the field of technology accessing knowledge has become very easy though attaining knowledge continues to be difficult. The pedagogy of reading, whether of print or online text, continues to lie in this power of time in the aptitude to comprehend words, temperament to read between the lines, capability to reflect on ideas, and the intuition to think beyond one's self, one's place, and one's time in the quest of knowledge.

In the contemporary world characterized by digital technologies though peopled by human beings, the education administrators should provide access to digital text without, however, brushing aside the students' continued desire to read from print and their need for the availability of appropriate reading spaces.

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## Reassessing Progress: A Study of Tripurari Sharma's *Aadha Chand* in the context of Globalisation and Displaced Identities

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### *Abstract*

*The present article seeks to examine the meaning of globalisation for the youth living in a developing nation and decipher the extent of progress intended by such a phenomenon. A state of rapid globalisation and its discontents is captured by Aadha Chand, a Hindi play by playwright-director Tripurari Sharma. This performance-based study of the play seeks to encapsulate Tripurari Sharma's approach of reimagining the implications of progress in Indian society in the context of Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) culture, more commonly known as call centre culture. The paper seeks to emphasise upon the idea that the incomplete quest for acquiring the Moon as presented by the title Aadha Chand presents a metaphor for the youth lost to the illusion of a flourishing economy and growth opportunities caused by globalisation. The paper seeks to analyse the dystopic impulses inherent in BPO culture in Indian context and assess the effect of the same on contemporary urban Indian society.*

*Keywords: Globalisation, Call centre, Identity, Disillusionment, Artificiality.*

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The rise of technology in contemporary world suggests a flourishing economy in the era of globalisation. As the term suggests, globalisation refers to the changing notions and exchange of ideas across the boundaries of cultures going through rapid transition in terms of economy, resources, ideologies, and progression. The juxtaposition of globalisation against progress is a bone of contention among people which raises a question on the accountability of globalisation as a promise of prosperity in the context of progress in a society. According to C. Rangarajan, globalisation differs in definition to different people as for some, it constitutes a "brave new world with no barriers," while it may be equated with "doom and destruction" for many (Rangarajan).

The manifestation of globalisation in the identity formation of the youth in contemporary times presents the dream of a utopian society. It projects a world brimming with opportunities in terms of employment and consequent development. However, riddled with issues of migration, identity crisis, urbanisation, and displacement, such a system has its own dystopic streaks as it results in disillusionment when the inhabitants of society fail to cope with the rapid development and displacement—a result of discontent which is a remnant of globalisation. Huma Baqai in 'Globalisation and Unemployment: Impact on South Asia' cites poverty and unemployment as exchangeable terms as those who

are struck by poverty are also the victims of unemployment (Baqai 55). Under adverse circumstances, the unemployed youth is in turn manipulated into tasks which come in handy for extremists and political platforms. This is also reflected in the way the youth is often attracted towards extremism at the hands of radical organisations. The highly educated unemployed often turn to measures which stand against the law, thus highlighting the dissatisfaction associated with globalisation and the idea of progress.

Increased hopes and expectations lead the youth of a nation towards migration in search of better employment opportunities. However, their dreams are stomped over when their expectations remain unfulfilled and hopes crushed as a result of disappointment in a society where overpopulation and unemployment go hand in hand. This is when Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) culture, more commonly known as call centre culture provides a fleeting moment of refuge to the youth. The boom in the number of employees in call centres highlights a rising consumerism through such a platform. Through such an employment opportunity, people are able to earn decent salaries at the beginner's level, which in turn provides them a sense of independence and makes them challenge traditional notions of work in Indian families such as the prevalent notion of preparing for government service and finding a permanent job. While this source of employment may provide immediate solution to the lack of job opportunities, it fails to provide a sense of satisfaction in the long term. The insecurity associated with jobs in private sectors due to a predatory atmosphere of competitiveness and temporariness paints an unfavourable picture of the call centre culture and presents a state of discontent associated with such a challenging atmosphere created by globalisation.

Tripurari Sharma is a prominent theatre practitioner as her plays have made significant contribution to post-independence women's theatre in India. It should be noted that Sharma's dramatic oeuvre entails approaches to local issues, women's question, and social criticism in a larger framework. For her contribution to theatre, she has received the Sanskriti Award, Bhartiya Natya Sangh Award, Safdar Hashmi Award and Sangeet Natak Akademi Award. She was also the Indian representative at the First International Women Playwrights' Conference in the United States in 1988. Tripurari Sharma also started a Delhi-based theatre group Alarippu in 1983 in association with Lakshmi Krishnamurthy which would focus on women's concerns, folk theatre, amateur theatre and children's theatre. It should be noted that Sharma's approach to theatre comprises of a creative collaboration which is reflected in her endeavour of organising workshops with local people such as factory workers, people from slums and rural areas, college students, and other oppressed groups. The primary concerns as reflected in her plays exhibit a premise based on a resistance against patriarchal authoritarianism and challenging the associated ordained rules practiced in a phallogocentric society. As a contemporary woman dramatist and practitioner, her works exhibit streaks of dissent towards perpetuated social prejudices, rampant corruption, and consumerism followed by globalisation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As a playwright and director, Tripurari Sharma's critical corpus consists of plays such as *Bahu*, *Aks Paheli*, *Reshmi Rumaal*, *Poshak*, *San Sattavan Ka Kissa*: *Azizun Nisa*, *Kath Ki Gaadi*, *Sampada*, *Traitors*, *Beech Sheher*, *The Gift*, *Roop Aroop*, *Maybe this Summer*, *Shifa: The Healing*, *Aadha Chand*, and *Shaayar...Shutter Down* among others which range from a women-centric



approach to a critique of corruption and globalisation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the context of the present study, it is important to analyse the concerns raised by Tripurari Sharma's *Aadha Chand* to present a critique of globalisation and its ethos of consumerism propagated through Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) culture, more commonly known as call centre culture in the contemporary scenario.

The dual life led by a call centre employee involves his/her origin and a virtual life involving an artificial accent and mannerism which makes it difficult to adjust to the real world. *Aadha Chand* by Tripurari Sharma captures various facets of the lives of call centre employees, their aspirations and disappointments. Furthermore, the coarse training process and rigorous rotating shifts are aptly presented to highlight the struggle of the youth between two identities, one its own and another adopted to communicate with the foreign clients. Sharma's approach of reimagining the implications of progress in Indian society is highlighted through a portrayal of the lifestyle involved in a call centre. The characters appear to the spectator as diminutions caught in the web of a larger corporate giant in the globalised world. These characters represent the entire youth who seeks to leave behind the shackles of poverty, backwardness, and inhibitions to achieve a sense of satisfaction and independence through a visage of calmness and a foreign language spoken in an artificial accent to cater to the clients and reach their respective targets to sustain themselves in their field and to stay away from the danger of risking their position in the workplace. In an interview for *The Indian Express*, Tripurari Sharma comments on creating a layered human drama by focusing on the lives of call centre workers:

So many people come to Delhi to work in call centres. They usually have a lower middle-class upbringing and suddenly find themselves engaging with a range of international clients on professional issues. I was intrigued by this act of changing one's name, taking on a persona, building a personality and what it does to the person who is caught between a real and a make-believe world. I have a question, which remains unanswered, about our voice. Is it real or virtual? It is real at the time of speaking but it disappears a moment later. *Aadha Chand* is an exploration along these scales (Nath).

Sharma's research for the play began with observing people around her, especially the youth, to understand the tactics of employment and cheap labour in a nation with lower job opportunities for the masses. This further indicates that *Aadha Chand* presents a picture of the mirage of prosperity created by globalisation. Recent development in the era of global exchange of information may have opened the doors to employment in contemporary times, but it comes at a cost which remains unknown to those who later fall prey to its discontents. For instance, in a flashback scene, an adolescent Vishnu states that he is reading *Around the world in Eighty days* by Jules Verne and he is praised by the narrator/visitor for aspiring to achieve bigger dreams rather than joining the traditional professions. Vishnu's father, a mechanic, aspires to raise his son to become an engineer. At this juncture, Vishnu's father is informed by the narrator/visitor about the rising unemployment and the rapid changes being brought through globalisation, which has

resulted in myriad of opportunities to earn substantial income in the beginning of one's career itself. He encourages them to allow Vishnu to explore such opportunities so that a job at the call centre may turn into an entry-point in his quest to achieve his dreams, to which they reluctantly agree. Hence, it should be noted that Vishnu “symbolises the shift in economy from hand-made tangibles to virtual services” (Nath). In *Aadha Chand*, the characters represent the young population making a shift from the rural to the urban areas in their quest for success in the era of globalisation.

In the play, the narrators, a taxi-driver and a 'thelewala'(costermonger), discuss the problems faced by the call centre employees and suggest how it creates a precarious situation for the employees which is determined by three factors, (a) the customer's dissatisfaction and complaint against the call operator, (b) the failure to maintain short duration calls, and (c) the failure to achieve their respective sales targets. Indulged in such a struggle at the core, the play highlights a fragmented self-image of the characters through a continuous struggle between their personal and professional lives. Malti becomes Margaret and Vishnu becomes Raymond, and many others who are transformed into Rita, David, and Angela to fit into their dual lives. In the play, Malti/Margaret relates Shakespeare's famous monologue by Jaques from *As You Like It* to present the plight of human beings as mere actors indulged in impersonations and continuing with the various courses of their lives.

All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players;  
They have their exits and their entrances;  
And one man in his time plays many parts,  
His acts being seven ages. (*As You Like It* 2.7.139-143)

Malti/Margaret quotes the abovementioned lines to echo the scattered and numerous lives led by the call centre employees. A neutralised accent with very faint traces of their mother tongue determines the good profile of a call centre worker. Rigorous training procedure to neutralize native accent and development of clear speech accordingly becomes a crucial need to engage with the customers at the international level. This is presented in the beginning of the play when the employees are being trained to develop an international accent, for instance, the pronunciation of the word “repeat” with special emphasis on the sound of the alphabet 'P' to be pronounced according to British/American English instead of Indian English. However, this also becomes a problem as the employee has to constantly remain in identity disguise with an artificial accent so that the customer is not able to distinguish him as a non-native English speaker. The repercussions of such drastic measures often lead to complaints and insults on the part of the customer when the native accent interference takes place on the part of the call centre employee. Michelle McIntyre in a project titled *Call Centres in India: Offshoring, Language and Globalisation* mentions that such a problem “can create internal turmoil for the worker”, while the “constant surveillance” to ensure the identity disguise of the worker can lead to severe frustration and subsequent health issues (McIntyre 13). A scene from *Aadha Chand* emerges as an example in this context. When Vishnu as Raymond calmly tries to answer the query of a customer from America, he is insulted and verbally abused by the customer who realizes that Raymond is

not from Boston, but from a small town of India:

Caller: I don't think so. I don't think you're from Boston, actually. I think maybe you're Indian or Malaysian!

Vishnu/Raymond: No sir, I am not from India or Malaysia, I'm from Boston, sir.

Caller: Are you sure about that? I think you are lying to me, you dirty little disgusting man!

Vishnu/Raymond: Sir, please try to understand. Use proper language sir . . . (Sharma).

The abovementioned lines highlight that identity disguise and artificial accent no longer help Vishnu as he breaks down and addresses his plight to the audience. Here, the co-workers make Vishnu realise that in such a pressuring working atmosphere, one cannot expect that work and respect can co-exist with each other. Even after going through such a mental breakdown, Vishnu, amid his anguish, is pressed to practice the catchphrase 'May I help you' in a calm and composed manner to continue working for the call centre.

Furthermore, Vishnu's insult at the hands of the caller also bring to the fore the idea that geographic location also affects the business of corporations involved in the operation of call centres. This is further highlighted when an argument ensues between the characters on the exploitation of call centre employees like themselves who have to bear the insults of the customer while they are forced to maintain a dignified conduct themselves. It should be noted that the argument between the characters is based upon their frustration with the call centre culture since they have to bear the insults of the customers while maintaining a calm demeanour and committing to a less-paying job that would otherwise pay way more in the West. This is the reason why customers are frustrated as well because their jobs are being seized by the people from another continent, those whom they consider inferior in relation with their own position in the West. While the wages of employees in the West are comparatively higher, the lower cost of operation of such centres in India is a significant factor behind the rising number of call centres and the measures taken to control the manner in which the workers perform and pertain to the acceptable forms of interaction, i.e. masking their identity and speaking English in a neutralised accent. This is because the accent and speech variation used in the West is emphasised here as well since the West is in the position of a global economic power considering it being enlisted as developed zone of the globe in comparison with India which is a developing country in terms of economic power. This highlights the exploitation done in a high surveillance atmosphere in the call centres with their specific constraints on accent and speech variation, failing which, the employee may become a victim to insults at the hands of a customer, and in most cases, lose his/her job if the set target remains unfulfilled.

The playwright-director also brings forth a gendered dimension to the play through the conflicts faced by the women characters. In the play Rama/Rita and Malti/Margaret converse in the restroom about their daily reality which is occupied by the domestic space and the restrictions followed by it. For them, there is freedom and

independence in the environment provided by the call centre. Rama/Rita asserts that at home, she has to keep quiet as if living in an air-tight compartment. In contrast, the call centre allocates her the power to live freely and use her voice as the sole medium to earn on her own. Another issue discussed here suggests that her family wants her to work and hand over the entire salary to them but they furiously resist any change in her lifestyle. The fear associated with the loss of control over women is transformed into a cultural policing which is exercised by their families to keep women in check. Rama/Rita further comments that she had a passion for acting but her family never approved of it whereas, in the process of adopting the garb of another person at the call centre, she is acting everyday while fulfilling her job as well. Therefore, the call centre is also a channel providing an escape from the domestic sphere and acts as an entry-point into the public sphere for these women. Rita's act of addressing her domestic identity 'Rama' by reprimanding her to stay inside her bag without disturbing her further emphasises upon her escape from the relegation to domestic chores in the private sphere. Similarly, the character of Angela symbolises women who are fighting the boundaries of the domestic sphere by working in the public domain as she tells her co-workers that she is divorcing her husband and seeking court dates to finalise her divorce and regain her freedom. The song "maine bita di life being a wife ((I have spent my entire life playing the role of a wife) ... and now I am singing to glory" signifies her struggle behind the domestic threshold and the emancipating effect of the access to public sphere and standing on her own feet. Angela dreams of leaving behind her bad marriage and starting a new life in this space which may enable her to open her own cafe someday. According to Tripurari Sharma, the play also suggests "how the night has opened for women" (Sharma), which is usually an excuse for imposing restrictions upon them. To be able to be out at night and earn a living stands at par in a country where too many restrictions take place for women with the beginning of the sunset. However, at this juncture, it should also be noted that Angela's death in mysterious circumstances in the play presents the dangers that lie within the idea of such a progress while also signifying the illusion of hope and fleeting sense of fulfilment created by the era of globalisation.

The gendered dimension in the play is also presented through the constant quarrelling between Rama/Rita and Deepak/David, a co-worker who often undermines her and tries to control her throughout the play as he claims to have taken up the responsibility of her honour in his attempts to police her actions. In the final act of the play, Rama/Rita is overcome by the promises of success and achieving her dreams as a caller praises her voice and she begins to dream of her place in the glamour-world while trying to achieve her sales target through that customer. Here, Deepak/David's jealousy rises again as he tries to control her through incessant yelling and by professing his love trying to coax her into accepting him, thereby creating an uproar in the workplace. As a result, she loses the deal as the customer disconnects the call and she is immediately forced to quit her job on the account of her failure in achieving the sales target.

The notion of progress in a globalised world is based on the foundation of dreams and promises for the youth. In the play, Vishnu's father finds himself inadequate to question his son's choices due to his own deplorable condition. Thus, the play also presents the plight of working class families as their children migrate to urban areas for better and swift

opportunities provided by call centres which is a significant factor in the rise of such workplaces. For instance, Malti/Margaret has a dream to get an opportunity to migrate to Boston for better prospects. She wants to go to a college in Boston for her education. She calls herself a nightingale who works at night when she is discussing her dreams with an employee at the call centre. At this juncture, the characters discuss that the company is planning to send some agents to Boston. Their dreams are targeted towards settling down in Boston as they work hard at the call centre. They are promised “aadha chand” or the half-moon as they vow to travel together with the moon as their companion. At this juncture, in the play, the unfinished search to attain the Moon presents a metaphor for the youth lost to the illusion of a flourishing economy. This is further emphasised at the end of the play when their hopes are soon shattered as the call centre is abruptly shut down and their quest for the moon remains incomplete, and the half-moon remains an unrequited love, much like the promise of progress with globalisation.

*Aadha Chand* by Tripurari Sharma depicts the desperation and plight of call centre workers in the era of globalisation to question the extent of progress intended by such a phenomenon. The play is a stylised rendition created through a merging of the spoken word, movement, acting, song and dance to represent the inner conflicts of the characters, their aspirations and the turmoil created by the call centre culture in the era of capitalism and globalisation. According to Renu Arora, the tug-of-war for power is depicted in the play through a scene where the characters are portrayed on the stage indulged in arguments while moving around via revolving chairs, thus representing the tug-of-war often associated with the seat of power (Arora 77). The play attempts to provide an insight into the impact of globalisation through a portrayal of changing human relationships and values by presenting the precarious situation of the youth of the country through their constant internal struggles.

The play is an attempt at revealing the dystopic impulses inherent in BPO culture and assesses the effect of the same on contemporary urban Indian society. In an article for *The Hindu* titled 'Spotlight on a Moonless World', Diwan Singh Bajeli mentions *Aadha Chand* as a “severe indictment of the functioning of call centre” and “a bitter resentment at a blatantly exploitative system” (Bajeli). Humanity is prone to the artificial and hierarchical lifestyle in the call centre which is devoid of human values. A major strand of the artificiality in BPO culture comes to surface in the play through Angela's death. The next day, she is replaced by another Angela, an impersonating individual just like the previous Angela whose absence remains unquestioned in the call centre. None of her co-workers are able to remember her original name as they see another Angela taking her calls in the absence of the previous Angela.

Another scene exemplary of such artificiality occurs when a caller urges Malti/Margaret to call an ambulance as his life is endangered at that moment, which leaves her devastated when she finds herself helpless due to her inability to physically assist the man in need who calls her, hopefully, thinking that she is from Boston. She has to lie to him at such a dire moment saying that she is nearby and will send him help. This incident makes her contemplate upon her decision of choosing the life of a call centre employee which is filled with artificiality and fake promises. She realises that everything is fake and

pretentious in the atmosphere of the call centre, thus blurring the line between the real and the virtual in the process as the real perforates her life and creates an identity crisis. At this juncture, she rejects the offers of promotion made by the board of the call centre as the aforementioned call becomes the final straw in her dissatisfaction with BPO culture and the promise of progress, ultimately leading to burst the bubble of her dream of acquiring the moon, the promise she had once made to herself. Similarly, when Vishnu/ Raymond is told that the call centre has shut down due to bankruptcy, he questions the relevance of unfulfilled wishes evoked by the false promises made by call centres. He looks back at his life reprimanding himself wishing he should never have left home which could have prevented him from falling into the trap of such an artificial and insecure facet of globalisation. At this juncture, one may conclude that the play represents the tussle between “the real and the virtual, trapped by market and enmeshed by the knots of gender, power and control” (“Merging the Real”).

In *Aadha Chand*, the call centre is a microcosm of the larger world which vows to follow the path of progress which, however, remains incomplete in its quest. In a Third World country like India, BPO culture is a boon with a bane for Vishnu/Raymond, Malti/Margaret, and characters like Angela who are mere pawns used for the capitalistic endeavours through the guise of progress by corporations operating the call centres which tend to exploit the workers while maintaining maximum profit themselves. For the characters in the play, the promise of prosperity and subsequent progress is not directly proportional to the idea of globalisation. *Aadha Chand* is thus a very contemporary play with its attempt at revealing the harsh realities of BPO culture and aptly portraying the incomplete quest for acquiring the Moon which presents a metaphor for the youth lost to the mirage of a flourishing economy and growth opportunities caused by globalisation.

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## REVIEW ESSAY

**Garuda's World-View: Looking at Annie Zaidi's *Prelude to a Riot*  
New Delhi: Aleph Book Co., Rs. 338, pp. 192**

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*Prelude to a Riot*, 2019 novel of Annie Zaidi tells the story of two families, across three generations, just as the polarization narrative develops and unfolds in a society and overwhelms the individuals in enthusiastic engagement or helpless resentment, indicating that “Eyes filled with diamonds that have learnt to/Ricochet like bullets, off silent walls” (*Prelude to a Riot*, Aleph Book Company New Delhi, 2019). One after the other, monologues measure the progress of the novel and it reminds the reader of his reading of Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*. In *The Sound and the Fury*, the great American had, via multiple narratives, brought home the tale of the fall of the South, of a southern family, the futile efforts to arrest the decline by arresting time, indifference of a Jason, compassion of a Dilsey and the self-immolation drives of a Caddie or the divine blinking unilaterally in the thirty three year old Benjamin. Annie Zaidi's 'prelude to a riot,' (so spelt in small letters), unravels the vices of gender bias, the constant 'othering' and hatred of a community, nurturing of the victimhood of the majority community, the ailing system of education, and the so-called democratic rallying of the forces bent on disruption in the society.

Devaki, Abu and Sanju, three friends of admirable intimacy at the college, have grown into an indifferent lot after Devaki chooses to marry Sanju much against the wishes of her father, the matter of caste is his strong mark of identity. With time, her father and her husband are on the same page with their views on Muslim community and their membership of Self-Respect Forum. Devaki, with her free liberal outlook, finds her relationship with Abu under a severe strain even as they speak the same language with a similar and keep sharing books. Her soliloquy begins with the words: “Meera writes in her new novel that stories of love and tears make her puke” (25). Now when they are briefly together, both keep staring at outside, and she knows, “The air was thick with the juice of the words we had locked behind our teeth” (26). Since, it is turning unbearable, she returns to “the safe island of literature and accents”. Her husband keeps telling her that “you can't trust people nowadays. Things are getting worse.. The hired hands are not locals. I mean, the local tribes are different. They would not, I mean, that's what Appa says” (27). There in a few words we get to know of migrating labour, lack of trust, and of things progressively getting worse. Devaki, along with Mariam and Yashika and Fareeda of the third generation, and even her bother Vinay's wife Bavna, in different measures, carry the burden of a society which is patriarchal and misogynistic.



Twenty four of this 181-page novel have Garuda in his class, at a bar, into a lengthy soliloquy, interacting with his students. Garuda is one character who can explain the causes which govern the convulsions in the contemporary society. He tells his students: "I am not here to help you read between the lines. Please read out of syllabus. A syllabus is 'set' for you. You understand? It is 'set' by people whose job it is to limit your knowledge. I am against syllabuses (164)". Of Abu, Fareeda, his sister tells us, "He is not even studying his course material. He always studies out of syllabus. And he eats whenever, whatever" (10). And, the 'othering' has travelled to third generation, maybe in the form of school time pranks as Yashika and Deepika force-feed Fareeda, 'special type of biryani . . . like a glob of fat' (15).

That this polarizing is of a recent origin and is being manufactured and trolled from time to time. Garuda tells his class, "Expansion for one translates into shrinking for another. Maurya suffered when Shunga got ambitious. Lodhi suffered when Babur got ambitious. Mughal empire shrank, Maratha grew. Vijayanagar grew at the expense of Arcot, Madurai. Take Bengaluru. The Marathas sold it for the princely sum of three lakh rupees" (77). So, Garuda elaborates, and further tells them about Jangama Massacre in which four hundred priests were killed as Chikka Devraja raised taxes and suppressed the rebels (78). And Devika points out, some say it's oral history, just a legend, there is no official record. Garuda has an explanation: "But if a ruler sanctions a massacre, they don't put it in his official biography" (78).

Devika is one character whose language is poetic, emotions anguished, agonizing her recall of better days. "Sanju, Me, Abu. Me walking between the two of them. A hundred bursts of laughter every hour," Devika broods over. She knows, it was Appa's doing, and when she told the family, she'd marry Sanju, Appa and Vinny told her, "The clan will disown you. You will not get one square inch of land, not one gram of gold, nothing" (34). Appa slowly comes to influence Sanju, rather converted him to hating the Other. Earlier, Sanju agreed, "the big difference was, our people turned upon a brown man and we allowed the whites to take control. That was a kind of treason. That was Sanju's word. Treason" (32). The three friends once agreed and shared such sentiments, "People change, but only to suit their convenience. Nobody submits to anything easily – king, custom, science. Not unless they are faced with fear, or favour. A king conquers a place and all the people become his people. They can take his faith and favour, or they can rebel" (31). From such a rational outlook, Sanju has regressed and gone over to the camp of Appa, who is proud of being one who belonged to a martial race. Appa liked to tell the story of the British felling Tipu Sultan, 'six, seven times a month'. Once he flung the pot of hot rice across the table, when Devika said that "if our guns were recognized by white rulers, then we must have done something to please them. Didn't that make us traitors? (29).

How did the laughter disappear, the smile vanish from the countenance of society, and who has done it, setting up, therefore, a 'prelude to a riot'? We learn more of that we as tune into Bavna's soliloquy, telling us more about Devaki as she was before her marriage and after it. Bavna confesses, "Even I used to be afraid of Appa. Why deny it? But Devaki? The way she was then, I was a little afraid of her too... Like she was a princess living alone in

some ivory tower" (58-59). She had revolted against her Appa. Bavna recalls further that she would call her 'baby', such the difference in years: "Later in her teens, she shot up. Grew taller than me. All these years later, the look on her face is exactly the same. Like she is judging you" (56). Once her father got thick with Devaki's husband, Bavna wonders where will she 'escape to'. She is also aware of the boredom of the mundane in her own life, "What's your life, Bavna, eh? Six cottages, boring tourists. Forty years old. And she will be 'this for another twenty years" (65). When Devaki visited her parental home after three years, she observes that Devaki spoke little, and kept 'twisting the edge of her saree between her fingers.' Bavna recalls the gossip about a girl of tenth class seen in the school with a boy on a Sunday, 'not in a compromising position', with a worker on the plantation. Later in the novel we find, how the Self-Respect Forum people, easily guessed by the reader, get active and then boy is found dead, and the newspaper also reports how a local shopkeeper was approached for information, "he spat on the ground and said, 'Just as well. Saved us a bullet" (117). The gulf keeps widening with time so much so as to devour the very society which allows such theories to gain currency among segments of its people.

"Whichever way you tell the story," tells Garuda to his students, "memory should not become a millstone around your neck" (101). That they must remember, "Nobody can give you the whole truth in one easy-to-swallow capsule. No scientist, no historian" (102). Wars fought over territory have been justified in the 'name of God, of righteous conduct, or free trade.' Self-Respect Forum forget "Hindu kings have brought down Hindus, even before anyone had coined the word 'Hindu' . . . Centuries of colonialism, imperialism, slave trade" (103). Both Abu and Devaki partake of Garuda's world-view. Self-Respect Forum is the indecent thing them; these people put up posters anywhere they wish to send a message home to the 'Other.' Kadir, the bakery guy also complains as such posters respect no private property, and they do not put those posters on their own walls . . . Devaki tells Abu to 'put up counter posters' Abu recalls, "They follow me. Those posters. That man's leery face. You noticed? They lightened his skin with Photoshop" (127). Mariam who after a dozen years of baking in suffocating conditions was picked up by Dada to take care of the new-born Fareeda and her brother Abu. She now supplements her earnings by serving as masseur. Abu finds that his grandfather diligently and completely ignores all the dirty talk orchestrating the polarization drive, but Mariam should know: "She's in and out of their homes. She hears what's said. Or do they lower voices? But surely, she can read in their eyes. Feel it on her palms, in the tips of her fingers. She kneads their flesh. Can such things remain hidden when the clothes come off? Doesn't the venom rise from their skin like a hot stink?" (128). Kadir is asked to serve one meal to those who join the proposed Rally organized by Self-Respect Forum. Kadir feels, those posters were 'squeezed into' his mouth and nose. At the bar, Garuda tries to intervene on Kadir's behalf, throwing a challenge to Vinny, but Kadir back home "shivered all night. The next day, my lips arranged themselves around the words: Sell it" (173). Mariam tells Kadir that someone had cast an evil eye on him; he should serve free meal to seven persons for seven days, or donate for the mosque fund. Kadir recalls in his soliloquy: "I did not say to her that goodness cannot be seduced, that blessings don't come with bribes. I drew her close and breathed in her smell. Coconut. I kissed her fingers, smelling of onion, and something sharper. Salty. Metallic. Iron" (175).

The last word in Zaidi's 'destined to become a classic' novel is of Dada, grandfather of Abu and Fareeda, generous employer of Mariam, (he keeps his part of contract even as she takes to her work as a masseur); he only knows: "This piece of land that my father bought and cleared with his own hands, and which I have sown and watered with my sweat.... All I know is the land and its riches. Pepper, Bananas, coffee, rice. This is what I understand" (178-179). Abu's eyes are 'filled' when Dada points to 'the lines underlined three times in red ink' by his son, Abu's father:

Who could I hurt without damning my soul?  
Who in this world is not my own?

Dada remembers what Abu tells him: "Those people are blockheads. They have two sores for eyes. They read nothing. They refuse to see your truth." Back in his room, the old man finds sleep 'impossible' and still he lies down and listens "to the hum of dawn spreading her wings across the estate . . . I thought I heard the moon rustle across the sky. A full bloody moon. Red and gold. A bride's colours" (180). This brings to mind Rahul Pandita's book, *Our Moon Has Blood Clots: A Memoir of A Lost Home* (Penguin Random House, 2014); at fourteen, he was forced to leave his home in Srinagar along with his family, a Hindu minority within a Muslim majority Kashmir. The majoritarianism is ominously lacerating the present-day world polity. Noam Chomsky termed three threats to the world: Climate Change, Nuclear threat and the decline in democratic institutions.

In conclusion, the present author submits to the readers of *Literary Voice* that this writing makes no claim to being a research paper. The precision and power of its narration, the poetics of its language, and the charged reverberations of contemporary conflicts which haunt the social media and hijack the genuine mandate by the voters into parading simple majorities as heralding a New Nation — such elements remind of Faulkner's classic novels, of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, and James Bovard's book, *Freedom in Chains: The Rise of the State and the Decline of the Citizen* (New York. St. Martin's Press 1999). Relying mainly on the textual illustrations, one cannot but notice how the language of a character like Vinny is so matter of fact, thin, dealing mundane as no more than the superficial mundane like Jason does in *The Sound The Fury*. More complex and layered a character is, more impassioned becomes the language, progressively move from the language of Bavna to Mermaid and Kadir, to Devika and Abu, and a shade Khalil Gibran touch to Dada's meditations. A demonstrative accuracy to provoke and convince is exactly what is retained in Garuda's language and his world-view. The name Garuda evokes symbolism of the deity, half bird, half human, at enmity with the snake, and, also of Vishnu, the Preserver in the Indian mythology, who rides the bird Garuda, and sleeps, in cosmic peace, on the snake lying with its raised hood in the ocean. The instinct to preserve must thrive and endure for the man to survive. In his Nobel speech, Faulkner rightly intoned, 'Man shall not only endure, but survive.'

*FROM PROF. SWARAJ RAJ'S BOOK SHELF*

Musings on Svetlana Alexievich's *The Unwomanly Face of War*

Trans. Richard Pevar and Larissa Volokhonsky

Penguin: 2017, pp. 384, Rs. 499/-



Lounging in a comfortable chair in my backyard with an anthology of ninety-nine poems resting in my lap, I was drifting in and out of languorous flirtation with sleep induced by the warm, high noon glow of the early March sun filtering through the branches of the guava tree. I had just finished reading Aleksander's Blok's short but very disturbing poem, "The Vulture" when the whining call of a black kite, a raptor, had my gaze turned skyward and I found it circling and gliding quite low with its beak pointing downward at almost right angle and its keen eyes surveying the ground below, perhaps for prey. Its graceful flight had me in thrall and after circling a few times, it flew away from my sight. Though it wasn't a vulture, but kites are known to be scavengers too like vultures. I reached out to Blok's poem once again that describes a vulture wheeling and scanning a desolate battlefield in war-torn Russia for dead bodies to feed on. A desperate mother in her hovel is wailing to her child in her lap to take her breast and feed. She exhorts him to grow up and be prepared to bear the cross. The second stanza foregrounds the immediacy of devastation of war in very starkly poignant images:

My country, you are still the same,  
tragic, beautiful as before.  
How long must the mother wail?  
How long must the vulture wheel?

The pathos of the concluding lines raises serious questions about why we have wars? Will we ever learn anything from our bloody history? Are we doomed to keep shedding human blood for reasons that appear utterly unreasonable and insane in the hindsight? Why do we glorify war and why do we valorize war heroism? These questions have no easy answers; there cannot be. But these questions are worth asking, especially in the present scenario.

Even perfunctory glance at our world today is enough to reveal that we are living in extremely violent times. Although there has been no World War after the Second, yet the world itself is war-torn. Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Palestine, Israel, and many African nations to name a few, have been witnessing wars in which millions of people have died and maimed. Apart from this, the rise of the ultra-right in many parts of the world, structural violence which is at the core of neoliberal economic regimes, and increasing identitarian struggles are pointers towards a violent, uncertain future. The methods of warfare have changed. Weapons of mass destruction have made wars unimaginably horrible. In the conventional warfare the combatants could see the sight of blood being spilt; in other words, theoretically, the conventional war did leave some scope for the gory sight of a bleeding, suffering enemy arousing some sense of horror and for the moral sense of the combatants kicking in. But the modern weapons can be fired from long distances on enemies who are just eminently eradicable numbers; there is no chance of a face to face confrontation and hence questions of conscience do not arise. As it is, for perpetrating monstrosity, we do not even require monsters; most of those who killed mercilessly during the Second World War were not monsters. They were perfectly normal people who had simply been pursuing a dream or a career or had been ideologically interpellated. This is what makes evil banal, as Hannah Arendt argues, in *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963). And given the state of increasing insensitivity to suffering and growing moral blindness in our world, evil is banal.

It is Svetlana Alexievich in her *The Unwomanly Face of War* who foregrounds the horrors of war in a way that can make us rethink if wars are really glorious or they are inhuman, brutal and shameful. *The Unwomanly Face of War* is a polyphonic, documentary style text based on oral testimonies of Russian women, who had experienced the Second World War on the frontline, in occupied territories and home front as soldiers, captains, sappers, machine gunners, drivers, mechanics, cooks, laundresses, snipers, sapper-miners, cavalry soldiers, tank drivers, nurses, paramedics, doctors, underground fighters and radio operators. Svetlana met hundreds of such women, interviewed them, recorded the conversations she had with them, and took down the notes. The book was at first not allowed to be published in 1983 in Russia since it went against the official history of the War. But after *perestroika*, a censored, truncated version was published in Russia in 1985. The present translated version appeared in 2017.

Svetlana does not claim that what she writes is a history of the War. She was not looking for such a history; she was rather trying to exhume those voices which had never been heard. About a million Russian women had served at the front but the official war narratives were mostly silent about them. Svetlana had to contend with both the political silence and silence resulting from essential ineffability of the experience of pain. But, she also encountered the fact that many of the women when provided the chance to speak, came out with their testimonies of violence and brutality about three decades after the event.

Svetlana's intention, she declares, was not to understand the event *per se*, but the "event of feeling." Calling herself a "historian of the soul," she writes: "On the one hand I

examine specific human beings, living in a specific time, and on the other hand I have to discern the eternally human in them. The tremor of eternity. That which is in human beings at all times." And while researching and recording this history of feelings, she discovered "the world of war, a world the meaning of which we cannot fully fathom." What she discovered in the process of trying to understand the world of war was horror, horror piled upon horror, stories of persistence of deep seated horrors and unending nightmares. Heroism is not wanting in the stories excavated by her; but heroism has horror as its constant companion. Slowly but surely, as the macabre face of the war unfolded, she realized that her quest was also "to understand what distinguishes death from murder and where the boundary is between the human and the inhuman. How does a human being remain alone with the insane thought that he or she might kill another human being." This quest led to further pondering over those questions which are deeply bound with our existence, the questions which, perhaps would never have raised their head if she had not embarked on this quest: "For instance, why is it that we are not surprised at evil, why this absence in us of surprise in the face of evil?"

The overriding impression one gets from the testimonies reproduced by Svetlana is that the psyche of her storytellers is split between the struggle they have to wage against voicing memories of the monstrosities of the war, and the instinctive desire against repressing these memories. ". . . it's terrible to remember, but it's far more terrible not to remember," as Valentina Pavlovna puts it.

It is very intriguing that a majority of the women interviewed by the author were volunteers. Many of them were teenagers who had just finished their school or were still in the school. They went to the army recruitment offices to get enlisted and then insisted that they be sent to the front. Why did they volunteer to kill and to get killed? Some of them did admit that they went pursuing the idea, the idea of communism, of nationalism; they were young and so was their idea too. Others just could not bear the idea of the German invasion of their motherland. But at their young age, did they know what war was? What death was? Or, for that matter, what even life was? Nina Yakolevna, a sergeant major, medical assistant of a tank battalion has a cryptic answer whose disclosive force is profound: "We went to die for life, without knowing what life was."

The volunteers were soon to find out that reality was not glorious at all. A war transforms a human being into a beast. Liubov Ivanovna Liubchik, commander of a machine-gun platoon avers: "In war they say you're half man and half beast. It's true. There's no other way to survive. If you're just a human being – you won't stay whole." They realized that war was filth, fear, horror, pain, and grief. The stories which they tell Svetlana, in their short, broken sentences full of pauses, sentences which are invariably repetitive, are stories of massacres, death, dying, torture, mutilation and rape. Olga Yakovlevna Omelechenko, a medical assistant in an infantry company says:

Heavy combat. Hand-to-hand . . . That is horror . . . Not for a human being . . . They beat, they stab with a bayonet, they strangle each other. They break

each other's bones. There's howling, shouting. Moaning. And that crunching . . . That crunching! Impossible to forget it . . . the crunching of bones . . . you hear a skull crack. Split open . . . Even for war it's a nightmare; there's nothing human in it. . . . Right after an attack it's better not to look at faces; they're some sort of totally different faces, not like people usually have. . . . Everybody seems slightly abnormal, and there's even a glimpse of something bestial. Better not to see it.

Piles of dead bodies were scattered everywhere, twisted and gnarled like dried up trees. Maria Silvestrovna, who served as a nurse talks of silence of death in the wards, the kind of silence she does not remember anywhere: "Every day is spent in fear, in terror. Shrapnel flies, you think your skin is torn off. And people die. They die every day, every hour, it feels like every minute." This is where language is shattered altogether and regresses into, to borrow the words of Elaine Scarry in *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985), the "prelanguage of cries and groans." And then, silence of death, the silence that speaks more effectively of mindless atrocity than speech does. And the silence of a cadaver, a corpse among the half-dead, and of the dying about to turn into corpses. Benumbing silence.

No wonder "war was woe" for most of Svetlana's storytellers. They came back deeply scarred, carrying a festering wound deep within, their faces burnt and many of them without legs, arms or hands. And finally, when they did return as survivors, what awaited most of them was double whammy; bruised and battered, grief smouldering within, they were ostracized by their own people, because having served in the army, they were not considered feminine and chaste any more. They were called "Army whores . . . Military bitches . . ." The victory did not bring them any joy. Even before their demobilization, sitting in the dugouts, they would discuss how they would begin their life anew: "Before we had been afraid of death, and now – of life . . . It was equally frightening."

It is not that the war did not have any tender moments. But they were few and far between. In some cases, love sustained life and in some other cases, love ended with the end of war. There is a very poignant image of two young lovers in a ghetto who were killed while kissing each other sitting on a bench in a street. Liubov Eduardovna, an underground fighter who watched them kissing from the window of her house wondered why they did not kiss at home, and concluded that they were in love and they knew that they would die in the ghetto anyway: "They were fighting . . . They wanted to die beautifully . . . That was their choice, I'm sure . . ." They had embraced death for love.

In the beginning of the text Svetlana claims that she wanted to "write a book about war that would make war sickening, and the very thought of it repulsive. So that even generals would be sickened . . ." And towards the end of the text, Tamara Stepanovna, a medical assistant says that their cry and howl have to be preserved: "We must pass it on. Somewhere in the world they have to preserve our cry. Our howl." She looks towards the sky to find birds who have forgotten the war: "For a long after the war, I was afraid of the

sky, even of raising my head towards the sky. I was afraid of seeing plowed-up earth. But the rooks already walked calmly over it. The birds quickly forgot the war . . ." Thus, in a way, the text ends on a note of hope, hope generated by the sight of the birds who have forgotten the war. But will the humans forget it? Will collective memories of violence and atrocity be mobilized for keeping the cauldron boiling or will memory be mobilized to understand, forgive and then to move on with life? To invoke Aleksander Blok, "How long must the vulture wheel?"

A Dutch sociologist, Abram de Swann in his book *The Killing Compartments: The Mentality of Mass Murder* (2015), has identified certain factors responsible for genocide in the Second World War in the main. These factors are: powerful, exclusive, internal group solidarity; a sense of shared history of a glorious past, a condition which draws its succour from massive mobilization of collective or cultural memory; a sense of common, shared goal; and reification of and non-identification with the Other. These conditions are thriving even today, in nationalist democracies too.

Svetlana's *The Unwomanly Face of War* may not be able to stop mankind from spilling blood, but it does foreground the utter futility of war and in doing so it makes us look inward, and also outward, which may help us understand the roots and workings of evil.

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## BOOK REVIEW

C.N.Srinath, *Australia, Canada and The Other*.  
Mysuru: Dhvanyaloka Publication. 2018. Pp.200. Rs. 400.

In this anthology are collected the critical articles written by Dr. C.N. Srinath over a couple of years. The first section deals with the Australian writers like Shaw Neilson, A.D.Hope, Rodney Hall, Les Murray, Judith Wright and Peter Carey.

The second section deals with the Canadian writers like Uma Parmeshwaran, Mordacai Richler, John Moss and Northrop Frye and the topics like the paradox of cosmopolitanism and so on.

In his note on Shaw Neilson's poetry he analyzes the theme of love and Nature in his poems and shows the flowery delicacy found in them. In his second article he traces the Indian element like *Kastura* deer, law of *karma*, and *kamadhenu* in the poems of A.D. Hope and Les Murray and others. He then highlights the celebration of the feminine principle in Judith Wright's poetry.

He then discusses the exilic experience (which is another name of the Trishanku state of belonging neither here nor there) of the Indians living in Canada as recorded by Uma Parameshwaran's poetry which is In another article he discusses how the assertion of ethnicity is paradoxically combined with the fashionable desire for cosmopolitanism in Canadian Writing. In his essay on Northrop Frye, he records his response as an Indian to Frye's views on education. Frye rightly says that all great literature is international, but we should remember that it should be international in appeal and not necessarily in theme.

The third section contains articles on Mulk Raj Anand, Arun Joshi, Sarojini Naidu, Jawaharlal Nehru Partap Sharma and the affectionate relationship between F.R.Leavis and Professor C.D. Narasimhaiah as teacher and pupil. His essay on Mulk Raj Anand's wide range of vision, the influence of great European writers on him and his encyclopedic range of knowledge have been traced briefly. Indian English critics have not done full justice to Mulk Raj Anand due to their limited knowledge and perspective. Srinath opens our eyes to this critical short sightedness of Indians. He then shows the Hindu element in Sarojini Naidu's poetry and the existential dilemma in Arun Joshi's *The Apprentice* and the authentic picture of Indian political life in Partap Sharma's *Days of the Turban* and the religious life in Anantanarayana's *The Silver Pilgrimage*. His essay on Literary Journalism and Literary Criticism in India should be taken seriously by the Indian academicians, who should have the courage to defy and cudgel the sleek views of literary journalists who create a lot of sound and fury signifying nothing, but fattening the self-love of publishers for a 'fat' remuneration thereby misleading the scholars of younger generation.

There are of course, the usual spelling mistakes and printers devils in the anthology, which should be corrected in the future editions.

On the whole the anthology extends the frontiers of our literary knowledge about Australia, Canada, and India, kindles our interest in the unfamiliar authors and suggests the virgin areas of research for the young scholars of India in pursuing their M.Phils and Ph.Ds. His observations on these writers are as insightful as interesting. *Kudos* to Srinath!

Dr. Basavaraj Naikar  
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## *POETRY COLUMN*

**Dr. Parneet Jaggi\***

### *My Sky My Universe*

The straight, white, dotted line in the sky  
reminds of the tickle in the stomach,  
when as a child, I questioned myself  
how an airplane could fly  
without falling down,  
how galaxies move without a tremor.  
Universe lies in our wax expressions,  
Aristotle reminded us.  
Each morning I refill  
my wax candles  
with pride and greed  
till they spill over the mats  
that adorn my study table.

Each evening  
the galaxy stickers on the ceiling  
glow with the fumes of my ego-  
burning bright, rising high.  
The stars and moons  
bought at a discount  
adorn my sky and universe.  
I love to quiz myself  
with the wonders  
as my fanciful flights  
crash land on the bed  
for a sweet siesta.

### *Monotony*

I had one mother all my life  
Was it monotony?  
Breaths that choke my lungs,  
Contracting expanding  
look like the blades of grass,  
trampled inside the boundary  
of a park or outside.  
The blue canopy overhead  
bulwarks me from  
the ultraviolet messages  
of the golden ball

that revolves around the axis  
for countless fractions of time.  
Is that a monotony?  
I carry the same limbs  
dressed up in attires  
of myriad hues  
shapes and sizes,  
complex and simple.  
The fear of monotony!  
I challenge my little abdomen  
with a gallimaufry of eatables,  
caressing it, admonishing it,  
whichever way it would move out of slumber.  
The fear of monotony!  
I was born like myriads before  
with a badge and a cross  
that ordain faceless life  
sans love sans fun.  
Now on a quest  
without any rest  
to explore and roar  
with howling winds and turning tides  
swinging ropes to the sky  
climbing the tamarind tree  
escaping to the regions  
of unbridled freedom  
playing into dusk  
celebrating life without being shy  
carve out a path to say good bye  
to onerous monotony.

*Epistles of love*

Epistles of love  
drop in my mail box  
while I am asleep,  
scores of them  
as blank papers  
not a word scribbled,  
stick to my clothes  
like band aids  
on lacerated flesh  
move with me  
draw an image  
of what I look like.

*\*Dr Parneet Jaggi is Associate Professor of English, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar  
Government College, Sri Ganganagar (Rajasthan) India.*

**Ms. C. Rosy\***

*Move On*

It'd be pure madness. Let's not marry and mar ourselves.  
I'll give you back your valentine gifts and love missives.  
Our kisses deep in my heart, I'll keep. Keep our cuddles with you.  
I'll neither convince you to come back to me nor contact you.  
I don't choose to be a better half and constantly weep.  
We're not compatible. Let's not just blindly leap.  
Without breaking our tender hearts, let's break up.  
Dash out and discover a new azure sky without makeup.

Let's treat ourselves to the luxury of a clean break up.  
Don't try to make up with me and dare to patch up.  
Let's push away the pungent past and move on.

I dare not become your faithful friend.  
But, let's not become a frosty fiend.  
Don't enquire after my health and send any letter.  
But, give me a secret smile when per chance we meet years later.  
Don't give my name to your daughter, and I'll not give yours to mine.  
When you introduce me to your wife as a friend, thinking its fine  
With a questioning look, her eyeballs may pierce.  
Then, you may cringe and perhaps, curse.

Let's treat ourselves to the luxury of a clean break up.  
Don't try to make up with me and dare to patch up.  
Let's seek out the sunny summer and move on.

*My Poem, My Babe*

Without any of my sweat and blood  
Born was my sweet brood!  
It's only with the aid of mysterious Muse.  
My egg didn't fuse.  
Yet, you and I are one.  
And we're in need of no one.  
What a pride! I have indeed, won.

You're mirthful, matchless and more like my mother.  
Your serenity soothes me which is similar to my sister.

You're fair and has a dramatic flair which resemble my father.

All fears flutter away like feathers

You'll ne'er fight with me and ne'er fly away from me.

I didn't marry and didn't even carry.

Yet, when I am miserable, you make me merry.

Though you're born without a dad, I am truly glad.

You're my toddler, and I am your virgin mother.

*\*Ms C. Rosy is Assistant Professor of English, St. John's College, Palayamakottai, Tirunelveli  
(Tamil Nadu)*

**Sadaf Fareed\***

*Once More*

Say it once more  
you love me.

Keep pouring honey  
in my dying ears  
rhythmic passion in your heart  
warmth in breath  
same ecstasy again  
To revive me  
before I go insane.

Tell me once more  
you love me  
As I snuggle in your arms  
cuddle up on the broad chest  
as the warm grip  
generates safety  
in the pounding heart  
and spasmodic starts  
of life engine.

Console once more  
you love me  
soothe my eyes  
with caressing lips  
and fingers' tips  
causing pulsations  
in loosening limbs  
triggering emotions  
that give wings  
to taboo regions  
of soothing rainbow  
and varied hues  
cause ruptures and flow.

Come flying  
assure once more  
you love me true  
for all my flaws

that is me  
who reclines  
at the feet of deity  
with heart of gold  
and mind's virginity.

*To My Animus*

Securely etched  
image in my eyes  
music in my voice  
fragrance in breath  
throb in my heart  
all pervasive  
here, there everywhere.  
in my soul and body  
kisses, touches and embraces.

Days away from you  
tear me asunder  
render me complete half  
half of moon  
Shining but not bright.  
Beautiful, not so alluring.  
Day by day, night by night,  
decreasing half,  
crescent of moon  
thin, elegant, ravishing,  
heavenly and prepossessing.

Crescent disappears  
dark night reigns  
universe, envelops  
soul, body and brains.

Prevailing gloom  
fails to dim the light  
of bliss  
gleaming very bright

In me you burnish  
give warmth and heat  
charging alive the wish

as the lone heart beat.  
My planet's circumference  
my very being  
thoughts, desires and self  
enraptured and wrapped  
by your soothing touch.

This is a new crescent now  
growing to be full moon.  
curved, tilted to bow  
to touch the lips of  
blessed beloved, not before June.

The lone spirit yearns  
for your grace  
once, for forever  
as pulsations on left  
gather fast pace.

A craving to meet again  
strong as before  
kills the pain of partings  
of life's train.  
True love  
shines bright in my eyes  
all for you  
full, entire, pious and pure.

With you all over me  
mirrored in eyes  
merged in voice  
fragrant in breath  
throb in heart.  
Invisibly you move  
in my heart, my soul  
and the pores of my being  
kisses, touches and embraces.

-----  
*\* Dr. Sadaf Fareed is Asst Professor (English), Women's College,  
Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh (U.P.), India.*



**Neha Singh\***

*Unnamed Heroes of Indenture: A Saga of Pain*

Met the sun in the sand  
And the sea in the night

A saviour came as *Arkatias*, showering love and gold  
Signed the contract, life becomes cold

Locked with the wire of desire  
Burning in the pain of fire

Carried away in ships, garnered our thought  
Working hard and beaten in fields, day and night we fought

The lustrous gold underneath the rock  
Living in extreme pain and shock

Unbearable wounds, following the darkness  
Standing in fire, numbing our senses

Dreams got shattered, realising our sin  
Golden days are gone, struggling to win

Indenture bounded us, made us freeze  
Searching ray of better life across the sea

Travelled to search, new world of hope  
Leaving our ancestors, got shackled by rope

The purpose of life was floating away from shore  
Defeated by deception, eyes became wet more and more

To whom we complain, standing alone and seeking assurance  
Losing my composure, sinking in boat and missing god's presence

We stood and fall, repeating the process  
Rupturing and suturing the wounds, they call it progress

Sowing the seeds of patience and perseverance  
Building a new world of humanity became our experience

Life spent watching stars, Memories are fading  
Hearing the voice of beloved, who is still waiting

Singing in silence, the glorious days of togetherness  
The unwritten history of struggle, not recorded on pages

What makes a story beautiful is triggering our mind?  
Writing down the phase of separation, which keeps us bind

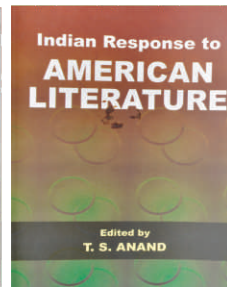
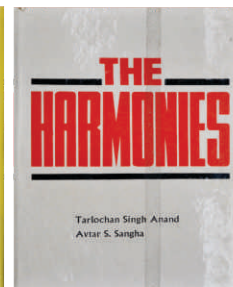
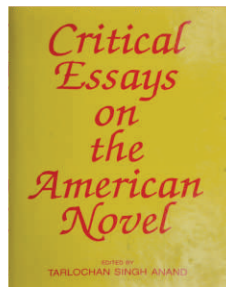
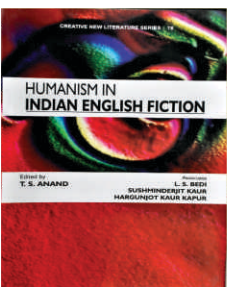
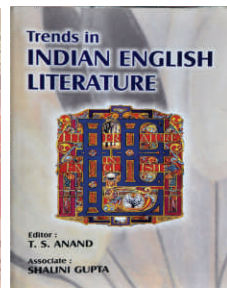
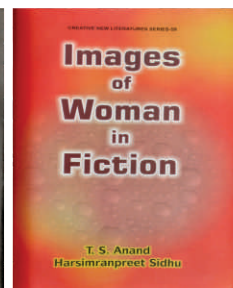
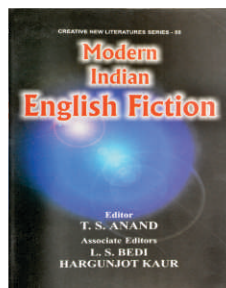
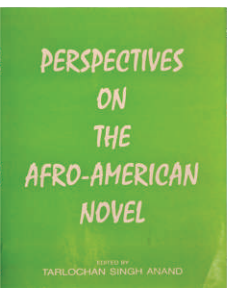
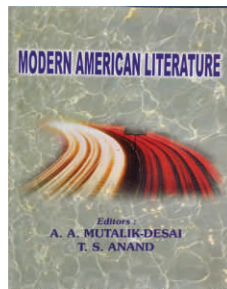
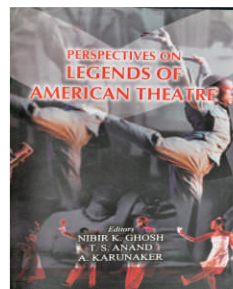
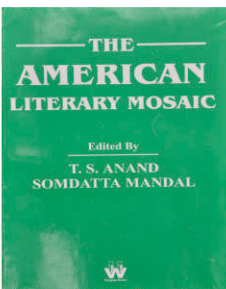
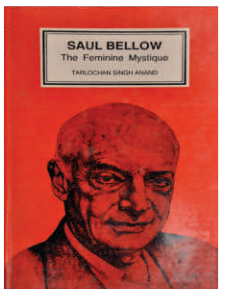
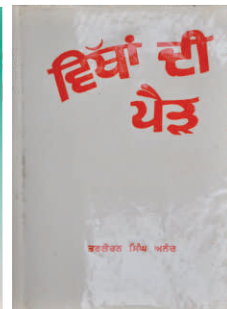
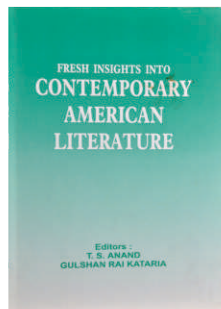
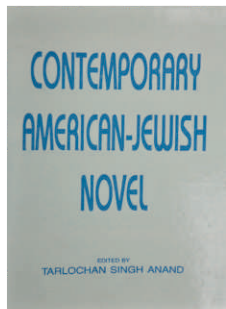
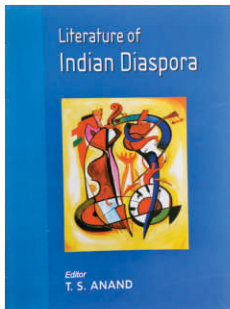
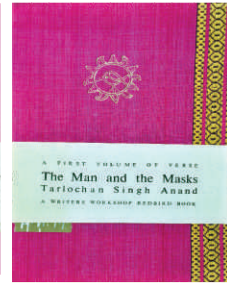
Indelible marks on soul, spending time in scorching sun and greenery  
Rewinding the days, why we started our journey

Covered space from agreement to Girmitya  
Died with dreams of homecoming, become Bidesia.

*\*Neha Singh is Researcher, Centre for Diaspora Studies, Central University of Gujarat. Her major area of interest is Oral History of Migration, Gender Representation and Cultural studies.*

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**Indexed with Web of Science ESCI, Cosmos, ESJI, I2OR, Cite Factor**

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*Literary Voice* (ISSN 2277-4521)  
Number 12 - Vol. 1 - March 2020  
Cover Design -- Swarnjit Savi  
Paintings: Parveen kumar

### **Indexed with**



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