



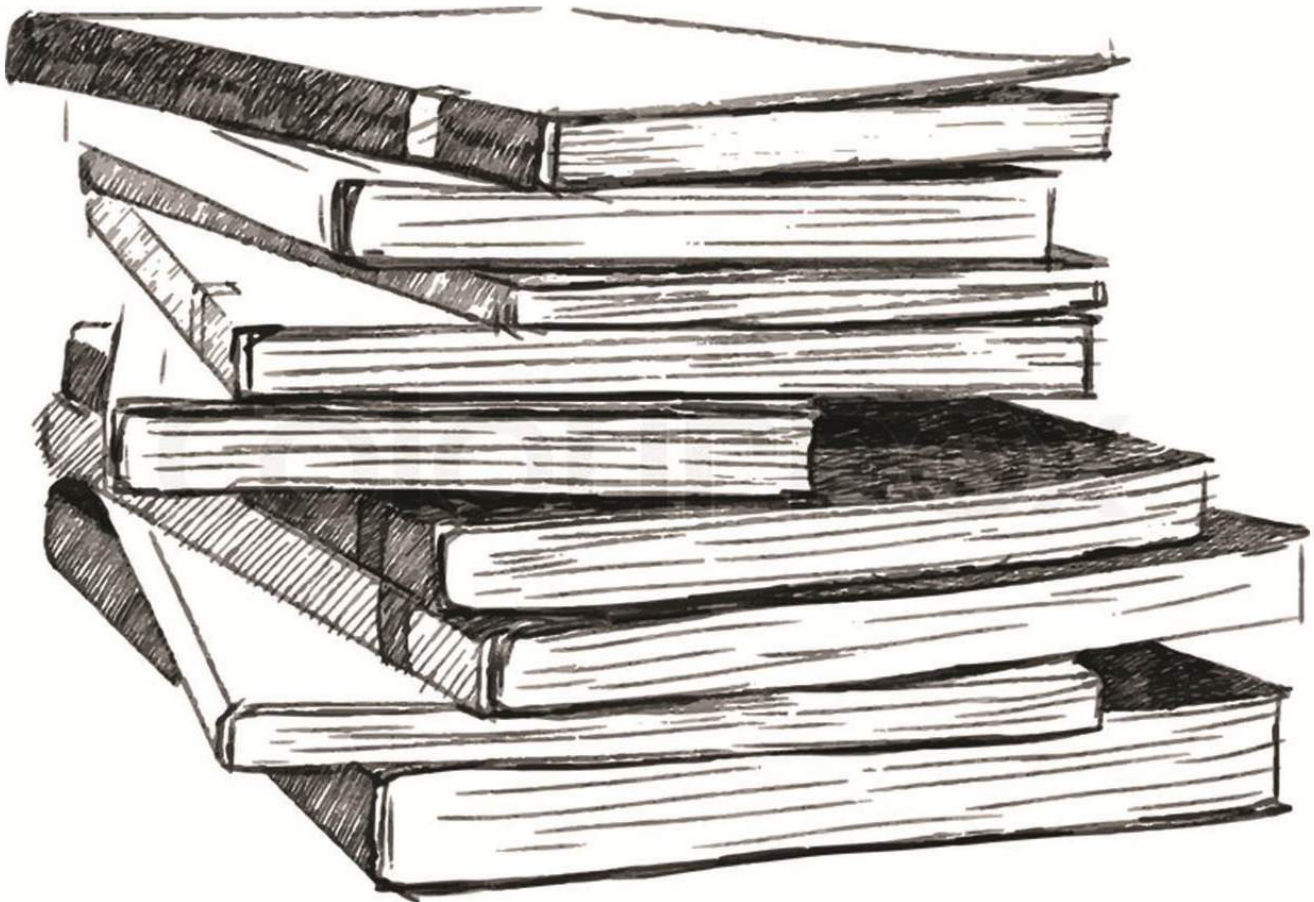
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FOREWORD

It is with great pleasure that we present this issue of the International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences (IJELS). As an esteemed peer-reviewed journal, IJELS is dedicated to advancing scholarly research and fostering intellectual dialogue in English literature, Education and Social Sciences.

Our journal is a dynamic platform for academics, researchers, and practitioners to share their insights and findings. This issue encompasses a diverse range of topics, reflecting the multifaceted nature of our disciplines. From in-depth literary analyses to innovative social science research, our contributors provide valuable perspectives contributing to the broader understanding of cultural and social phenomena.

At IJELS, we are committed to upholding the highest academic rigour and integrity standards. Each submission undergoes a meticulous peer-review process, ensuring that only the most original and impactful research is published. Our editorial team, comprised of experts from around the globe, works diligently to maintain the quality and relevance of our journal.

We are particularly excited about the current issue, which includes groundbreaking studies and thought-provoking articles that challenge conventional wisdom and open new avenues for exploration. We believe these contributions will inspire further research and foster meaningful discussions within the academic community.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our authors for their dedication and contributions, our reviewers for their insightful feedback, and our readers for their continued support. As we strive to expand the horizons of knowledge, we invite you to engage with the content of this issue and participate in the ongoing dialogue that shapes our understanding of literature and social sciences.

Thank you for being so committed to scholarly excellence.

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A Comparative Study on the Cultivation of Cultural Awareness in Chinese and Foreign Primary School English Textbooks

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Abstract— *The primary school stage marks the foundational phase of English language learning, during which the importance of immersive cultural education for students is self-evident. The cultivation of cultural awareness at this stage has a profound impact on learners' future effectiveness in English learning and communication. This study is grounded in theories of intercultural communication and textbook evaluation, conducting a comparative analysis of three sets of domestic and three sets of international primary school English textbooks. It examines their similarities and differences in the selection and presentation of cultural content, explores the existing issues and shortcomings in Chinese primary English textbooks regarding the cultivation of students' cultural awareness, and proposes recommendations for textbook development. The aim is to foster Chinese cultural consciousness and strengthen cultural confidence among students from an early age.*



Keywords— *cultural awareness; primary school; English textbooks; English teaching*

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Significance

Culture serves as the spiritual pillar of a nation or an ethnic group, exerting subtle influence over time. According to Encyclopedia of Soft Science, cultural awareness originates from human life and reflects the values and needs of contemporary society. In 2022, China's newly revised edition of "The English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education" points out that cultural awareness refers to the understanding of Chinese and foreign cultures and the appreciation of outstanding cultures. It is manifested through students' cross-cultural cognition, attitudes, and

behavioral choices in the new era. It includes four aspects: cultural knowledge, cultural understanding, intercultural communication awareness, and intercultural communication ability. Cultivating cultural awareness fosters patriotism, global citizenship, character, and social responsibility. This standard scientifically tailors different requirements for the cultivation of cultural awareness in students at various stages of compulsory education, based on their psychological development characteristics.

Being the primary source for teaching and learning, textbooks play a vital role in guiding both teaching content and student learning direction. Thus, the selection and

arrangement of textbook content provide clear direction for teaching and learning, making textbooks an essential medium for cultivating cultural awareness. Since 2001, China's curriculum reform has adopted the policy of "one syllabus, multiple textbooks", leading to diversification in English textbooks, with some schools adopting foreign versions. High-quality textbooks can embody curriculum concepts, reflect appropriate teaching objectives, include a complete system of knowledge and skills, and demonstrate advanced pedagogical theories and methods, fostering students' comprehensive language abilities. However, several issues remain regarding cultural awareness in current Chinese primary English education and materials.

First, due to China's vast geography and regional disparities in economic development, educational resources are unevenly distributed. Compared with major cities like Beijing and Shanghai, many local schools lack emphasis on English education, have underqualified teachers, and focus heavily on grammar and vocabulary for exam preparation, while neglecting listening and speaking skills and, more critically, the cultivation of cultural awareness.

Second, influenced by their environment and native language habits, many primary school students find English difficult. They often only learn simple vocabulary and sentence structures without gaining a deep understanding of cross-cultural communication or developing cultural awareness.

Third, there is a lack of systematic English teaching materials aimed at cultivating cultural awareness. Textbooks from different regions and publishers often lack clear objectives, focus, and innovative design, and fail to form a coherent and progressive system.

Given these issues, developing textbooks tailored to cultivating cultural awareness among primary students is urgent. New textbooks should particularly emphasize helping students understand Chinese and foreign cultural connotations, compare cultural similarities and differences, and acquire knowledge of multiculturalism during language learning. The content should be more relatable to students' lives and times and be rich in cultural depth.

1.2 Research Objectives and Content

English learning at the primary level is foundational—it marks the beginning of a student's English education journey. Infusing cultural education at this stage is crucial. The development of cultural awareness significantly impacts learners' future ability to engage in effective communication and language learning. This study, based on cross-cultural communication theory and textbook evaluation theory, conducts a comparative analysis of three Chinese and three foreign primary English textbook series. It aims to identify similarities and differences in how these textbooks foster cultural awareness in students, offer critical analysis, and propose recommendations for textbook development and evaluation. The study consists of four main parts.

Analysis of Chinese Textbooks (A, B, C): Based on the curriculum standards, the study will analyze how cultural content is organized and presented. Six dimensions will be used: local customs, traditions, lifestyles, behavioral norms, literary arts, and values. The goal is to evaluate whether the content aligns with the standards, its strengths, and its shortcomings.

Analysis of Foreign Textbooks (D, E, F): The study will examine the structure and cultural presentation of three foreign textbook sets, explore the expectations these materials set for students' cultural awareness, and investigate how textbook design fosters such awareness.

Comparison of Chinese and Foreign Textbooks: This study will compare the similarities and differences in how cultural content is structured and presented, exploring the causes of these differences and identifying gaps in the cultivation of cultural awareness in Chinese textbooks.

Recommendations for Chinese Textbook Development: This study emphasizes that cultural awareness is a core component of English language competency. It suggests that textbooks should integrate elements of traditional Chinese culture, revolutionary culture, advanced socialist culture, and global cultures. It will also explore how to seamlessly embed these elements in textbooks to cultivate students' cultural awareness in an implicit and consistent way, forming a well-structured and coherent educational system.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Research on Foreign Language Textbooks at Home and Abroad

Research on foreign language textbooks originated abroad, mainly focusing on textbook analysis, evaluation, and usage. Cunningsworth (2002) emphasized that effective evaluation depends on asking the right questions and interpreting the answers. McDonough & Shaw (2003) proposed that textbook evaluation consists of external and internal evaluations, with evaluation criteria centered on the teacher, focusing on the actual input and output generated by the textbook. Sheldon (1988), adhering to a learner-centered language learning philosophy, argued that learners' interests and needs determine the content of textbooks. In China, scholars such as Liu Daoyi (2004), Zhuang Zhixiang (2006), Han Baocheng (2014), Liu Yanhong (2015), Wen Qiufang (2017), Zheng Xiaohong (2018), and Zhang Hong (2020, 2022) have carried out textbook analysis and evaluation studies from various perspectives.

Research on textbook use began in the 1990s. Hutchinson & Waters (1987) and Guerrettaz (2021) offered varying definitions of textbook use, reflecting its dynamic and contextual characteristics. Canniveng & Martinez (2003) believed that foreign language textbook use results from the interaction among second language acquisition theory, teacher cognition, and teaching experience. Brown (2009) summarized five types of teacher-textbook interactions. Shaver (2010), through empirical studies, identified three orientations in teachers' use of textbooks. Grammatosi & Harwood (2014) adapted textbook usage analysis frameworks originally proposed by Remillard (1999) and Brown (2009) in the context of mathematics for use in foreign language textbook studies. These foreign studies have been highly enlightening for Chinese scholars. In China, researchers such as Luo Shaoxi & Xu Xin (2011), Guo Yan & Xu Jinfen (2015), Zhang Hong & Li Xiaonan (2022), and Xu Jinfen & Liu Wenbo (2023) have examined textbook use from different perspectives.

2.2 Research on Cultural Awareness at Home and Abroad

There is no unified definition of cultural awareness among foreign scholars, but several representative

definitions exist. Hanvey (1979) defined cultural awareness as "the understanding of the cultural background knowledge of both parties in intercultural communication." Anderson (1983) viewed it as "awareness of surface-level cultural phenomena and of differences within one's own culture." Byram (1993) defined it as "critical insight into cultural phenomena, patterns, and features, as well as the relationships between different cultures." Chen & Stacosta (1996) described it as "the ability to understand foreign cultures based on knowledge of both one's own and others' cultures." Tomlinson (2004) explained cultural awareness as progressing from shallow understanding to rational analysis and deep experiential learning—learning to view cultural phenomena from the perspective of the target language's culture. Milton J. Bennett (2003) described it as "the ability to continuously adapt to and adjust in response to cultural differences." Despite differing perspectives, methods, and expressions, scholars agree that the essence of cultural awareness lies in understanding cultural knowledge, recognizing cultural phenomena of the target language, and being able to interpret them from the perspective of that culture.

Through systematic review and analysis of foreign literature, it is found that studies on cultivating cultural awareness in foreign language teaching often begin with cultural instruction. These studies explore definitions, current states, influencing factors, and enhancement strategies, providing theoretical support for the development of cultural awareness in Chinese students. In China, scholars have explored cultural awareness cultivation in foreign language teaching from various perspectives. Research on the definition of cultural awareness includes works by Zhao Tongqing (2007), Guan Lilian (2016), Han Xiao (2017), and Zhang Cewen (2019). Studies on the current situation include Guan Jing (2014) and Xie Ruimin (2020). Scholars like Pan Weiji (2019), Wu Yanling (2021) have examined strategies for cultivating cultural awareness. Others have analyzed the role of textbooks in this process, such as Ma Li (2018) and He Long (2019).

2.3 Research on Cultural Content in Foreign Language Textbooks at Home and Abroad

Nostrand (1974) was one of the first scholars to systematically discuss cultural content in the field of linguistics. He categorized over thirty aspects of culture into four domains: culture, society, ecology and technology, and the individual. Byram (1993) proposed eight cultural content areas for intercultural foreign language textbooks. More recently, Risager (2006), using theoretical frameworks from national studies, civic education, cultural studies, postcolonialism, and transnational studies, investigated how cultural content is presented in textbooks of six languages and how textbooks shape learners' self-understanding and intercultural competence.

In China, studies on cultural content in English textbooks or on intercultural communication have mostly focused on the university level. Influential scholars include Wang Yan (2011), Zheng Xiaohong (2018), Zhang Hong & Yu Rui (2020), and Zhang Xuemei (2021). A keyword search on the CNKI database using "primary and secondary schools, English textbooks, cultural awareness" yielded 28 results, including 4 master's theses and the rest journal articles. A search for "English textbooks, Chinese culture" yielded 44 results, with only two published in CSSCI journals. These studies mostly revolve around English teaching, exploring how to integrate Chinese and Western cultural instruction into the classroom to develop students' cultural awareness and intercultural communication skills.

2.4 Evaluation of Existing Research

Although both domestic and international scholars have conducted extensive research on cultural awareness and cultural content in English textbooks and instruction, several gaps remain. First, while there are numerous studies on college-level English textbooks, authoritative research on primary and secondary education materials is scarce. Second, most research focuses on the current situation, problems, influencing factors, and strategies for cultivating cultural awareness in English instruction, with fewer studies on specific teaching methods and the cultivation process itself. Third, research tends to focus on domestic textbooks, and comparative studies between Chinese and foreign

textbooks are rare. These gaps offer ample space for further exploration in this research project.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Questions

This study is grounded in intercultural communication theory and textbook evaluation theory, and it conducts a comparative analysis of three sets of Chinese primary school English textbooks (A, B, C) and three sets of foreign primary school English textbooks (D, E, F). The main research questions are as follows.

- (1) What are the overall and specific characteristics of the cultural content in Chinese textbooks?
- (2) What are the characteristics of the organization and presentation of cultural content in foreign textbooks?
- (3) Compared to foreign textbooks, what are the strengths and shortcomings of Chinese textbooks in cultivating students' cultural awareness?
- (4) What suggestions can be made for the development and compilation of new textbooks regarding the cultivation of cultural awareness?

3.2 Research Subjects and Research Thinking

The research subject of this study is primary school English textbooks, both domestic and international. The research thinking includes the following steps. First, through literature review and analysis, the study seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of relevant concepts such as cultural classification, cultural content, definitions of cultural awareness, and textbook evaluation, thereby grasping the current state of research on cultural content in primary school English textbooks. Second, the study analyzes the curriculum standards' requirements for cultural awareness, and examines the design logic and presentation of cultural content in three sets of Chinese and three sets of foreign textbooks. This step aims to explore similarities and differences and uncover the underlying reasons. Third, interviews with teachers and surveys with students will be conducted to assess primary students' grasp of cultural knowledge and their attitudes toward cultural awareness. The study also investigates how English teachers perceive textbooks and what their expectations are. Finally, based on the analysis and findings, and in combination with relevant

theories, the study proposes recommendations for textbook development and compilation.

3.3 Research Methods

This study adopts a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, specifically utilizing the following approaches.

Textual Analysis: Textual analysis will be used to examine and count the frequency and distribution of cultural content in three sets of Chinese and three sets of foreign primary English textbooks. The data will be categorized and summarized. Based on the curriculum standards' requirements for cultivating intercultural awareness, the study will identify issues related to the selection and proportion of cultural content in the textbooks.

Comparative Analysis: A comparative analysis will be conducted to identify similarities and differences in how cultural content is organized and presented in Chinese and foreign textbooks, with the aim of exploring new pathways for cultivating cultural awareness.

Interviews: Teacher interviews will be used to investigate and analyze English teachers' understanding and interpretation of the cultivation of cultural awareness through textbooks. The interviews will also examine teachers' own cultural competence, the challenges they face in promoting students' cultural awareness, and the difficulties encountered in classroom practice. Based on these findings, the study will propose strategies to improve teachers' cultural literacy and teaching competence in cultural education.

IV. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Comparison of Domestic Textbooks

4.1.1 The Cultural Content of Domestic Textbooks

We reviewed several sets of domestic primary school English textbooks and selected three—Textbook A, Textbook B, and Textbook C—for a comparative study. The cultural content in each textbook is roughly analyzed as follows.

Textbook A consists of six units per volume. It places relatively greater emphasis on shaping values, with each unit in every volume featuring a “Story Time” section that

conveys values such as “pride leads to downfall”, “no pain, no gain”, and “unity and friendship”. There is little explicit cultural content in the textbooks for Grade 1 and Grade 2, except for an introduction to Christmas in the second semester of Grade 2. For Grade 3, topics include dates of different Chinese and foreign festivals, climate comparisons across cities, daily meal habits in different cities, and Chinese New Year celebrations. For Grade 4, content covers popular sports among children in four countries, urban transportation methods, and brief introductions to the UK, USA, Canada, and Australia. For Grade 5, there appear introductions to various Chinese and Western festivals, historical and modern methods of communication, healthy lifestyles, and vacation practices. For Grade 6, content covers introductions to Chinese cities, historical and geographical overviews of the UK, USA, Australia, Canada, and France. There are also comparative introductions to Chinese festivals, like Spring Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival, and Western festivals, like Christmas and Thanksgiving; and introductions to famous inventors, artists, and scientists from China and abroad.

We have systematically analyzed the texts (including dialogues, listening scripts, stories, and nursery rhymes) of each volume in every textbook series. These texts were categorized and statistically analyzed across six dimensions: local customs, traditions, lifestyles, behavioral norms, literary arts, and values. The data was compiled into Excel spreadsheets. The pie chart below illustrates the proportion of cultural content across these dimensions of Textbook A (See Figure 1).

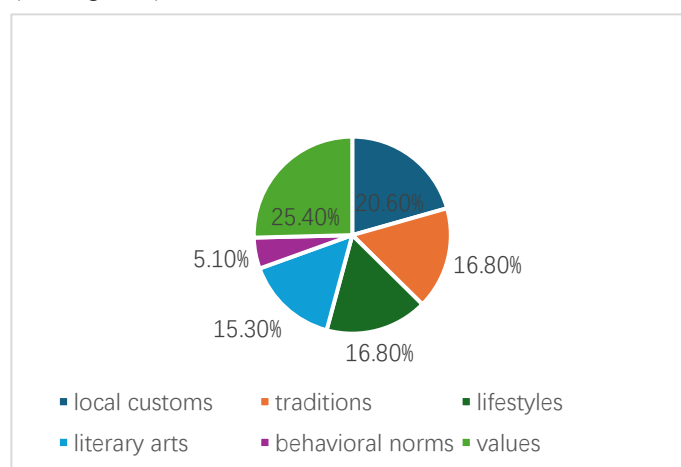


Fig.1 The percentage of cultural content in Textbook A

Textbook B contains eight units per volume. For Grades 1 to 4, there is almost no explicit cultural content, except for daily behavioral norms in Unit 8 of Grade 2 (Second Semester), New Year celebrations in Unit 8 of Grade 3 (First Semester), and library rules in Unit 2 of Grade 3 (Second Semester). Starting from Grade 5, each unit includes a “Culture Time” section, covering comparisons of Chinese and Western festivals, clothing, etiquette, food, traffic rules, and differences between British and American English vocabulary. Additionally, there are many fairy tales that promote values such as teamwork, mutual assistance, honesty, and trustworthiness. Just like Figure 1, the pie chart below illustrates the proportion of cultural content across the six dimensions of Textbook B (See Figure 2).

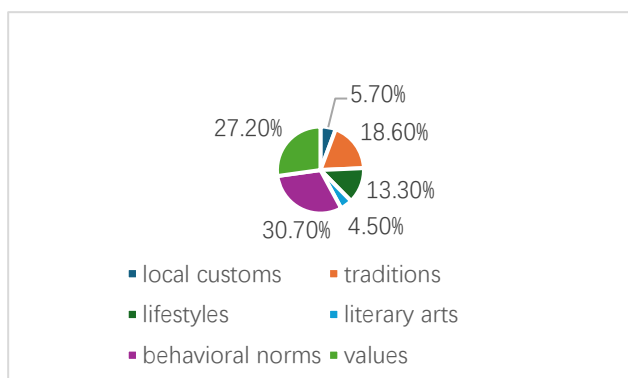


Fig.2 The percentage of cultural content in Textbook B

Textbook C is structured into four modules per volume, with three units in each module. The module titles remain the same across semesters (e.g., first and second semesters of the same grade). There is almost no culture-related content for lower grades, except for Mother’s Day in the second semester of Grade 2. The textbook for the second semester for Grade 3 introduces Children’s Day in different countries. Grade 4 covers Chinese traditional festivals, table manners, and cultural topics like Earth Hour while Grade 5 includes introductions to Western festivals and museums such as the Louvre in France. The pie chart below illustrates the proportion of cultural content across the six dimensions of Textbook C (See Figure 3).

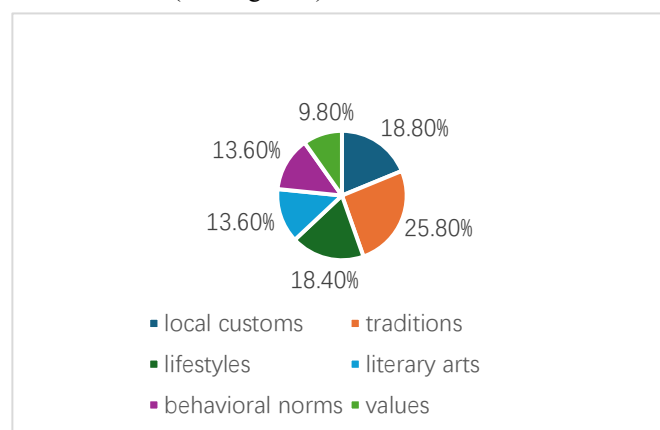


Fig.3 The percentage of cultural content in Textbook C

The following table is an overview of cultural content in the three domestic textbooks (See Table 1).

Table 1: Overview of Cultural Content in Domestic Textbooks

Item Textbook	Textbook A	Textbook B	Textbook C
Number of Volumes	12	10	12
Units per Volume	6	3 Units* 4 Modules	8
Start of Cultural Content	Volume 1, Grade 2 Unit 6 Christmas Gifts	Volume 2, Grade 2 Unit 2 Mother’s Day	Volume 1, Grade 3 Unit 8 Happy New Year
Dedicated Cultural Section	Story Time	None	Culture Time (from Grade 5)
Frequency Rank	Values>Local customs>Traditions>Lifestyles>others	Behavioral norms>values>Traditions>Lifestyles>Others	Traditions>Local customs>Behavioral norms>values> Others
Ways of Presentation	listen; read; story telling	look and read	read

4.1.2 Comparison of Cultural Content and Ways of Presentation

Through analysis and comparison, we have identified the following common characteristics in the cultural content presentation of the three domestic textbook sets.

(1) In terms of cultural content selection, there is a strong emphasis on British and American culture, primarily covering lifestyles, traditional festivals, and similar topics.

(2) The main presentation formats are dialogues and short passages.

(3) Cultural-related content is scarce in lower-grade materials and mainly appears in higher-grade sections.

The distinctive features of the three domestic textbook sets in cultural content presentation are as follows.

(1) Textbook B includes a relatively richer variety of cultural-related content.

(2) Textbook A emphasizes the shaping of values.

(3) Textbook C demonstrates greater coherence and systematic organization.

The issues identified in the cultural content presentation of the three domestic textbook sets include the following points.

(1) A narrow selection of cultural content, limited to traditional Chinese culture and British/American culture, with insufficient inclusion of revolutionary culture, advanced socialist culture, and global progressive cultures.

(2) Lack of depth in content, as well as insufficient coherence and systematic structure.

(3) Monotonous presentation formats.

4.2 Comparison of Foreign Textbook

We reviewed several sets of foreign primary school English textbooks and selected three—Textbook D, Textbook E, and Textbook F—for a comparative study. The cultural content in each textbook is roughly as follows.

Textbook D is an elementary English textbook published by National Geographic and exclusively distributed in Asia. It consists of six volumes, each containing eight units plus an Extra Culture section (referred to as Celebrations in Volumes 1–3). Volume 1 introduces Christmas. Volume 2 covers London, Thailand's floating markets, traditional clothing from Japan, Poland, Thailand, and Scotland, as well as New Year's and Mother's

Day. Starting from Volume 3, the cultural content becomes more diverse, including Australia's seasons, skiing in Scotland, Egypt's geographical location; foods favored by children in Italy, the US, the UK, and India; unique transportation in Japan, Egypt, Italy, and Thailand. Volume 4 explores the lifestyle of the Inuit, boarding schools in Indonesia and schools in central Australia, global cuisines from Spain, Italy, and other regions, and the lighthouse on Block Island in the US and Poland's Upside-Down House. Volume 5 presents professions in different countries, the weaving techniques in Bangladesh, Chinese martial arts, the Egyptian pyramids, the Grand Canyon, and the London Eye. Volume 6 offers an overview of Venice in Italy and Prague in Czech, and introduces India's Diwali, Mardi Gras in New Orleans and handmade cushions from Nepal.

As we have compared and analyzed domestic textbooks, we have also sorted out cultural content of the foreign textbooks from six dimensions, namely, local customs, traditions, lifestyles, behavioral norms, literary arts, and values. The bar chart below illustrates the frequency of occurrence of cultural content across these dimensions of Textbook D (See Figure 4).

Textbook E is published by a prestigious British publisher and consists of five volumes for the primary school stage. The first volume contains very little cultural-related content, only including introductions to breakfast in the United States and Vietnam. Volume 2 features an introduction to Cardiff in the UK, ancient Egypt, Mexico, Greece, Chinese astronomical knowledge, types of houses around the world, cafes with different characteristics, and the classification of fiction and non-fiction. Volume 3 covers the dragon dance during Chinese New Year, wedding ceremonies in different countries, and the art of painting. The cultural content in the fourth volume includes an introduction to Peru, the ancient Roman Colosseum, an overview of Australia, primary education in Kenya, the New Zealand Māori Haka dance, flamenco dance, and the world-famous painting of Mona Lisa's Smile. Volume 5 explores cultural topics such as the Egyptian pyramids, the Brazilian Carnival, as well as myths and legends. The following bar chart showcases the frequency of occurrence

of cultural content across the six dimensions of Textbook E
(See Figure 5).

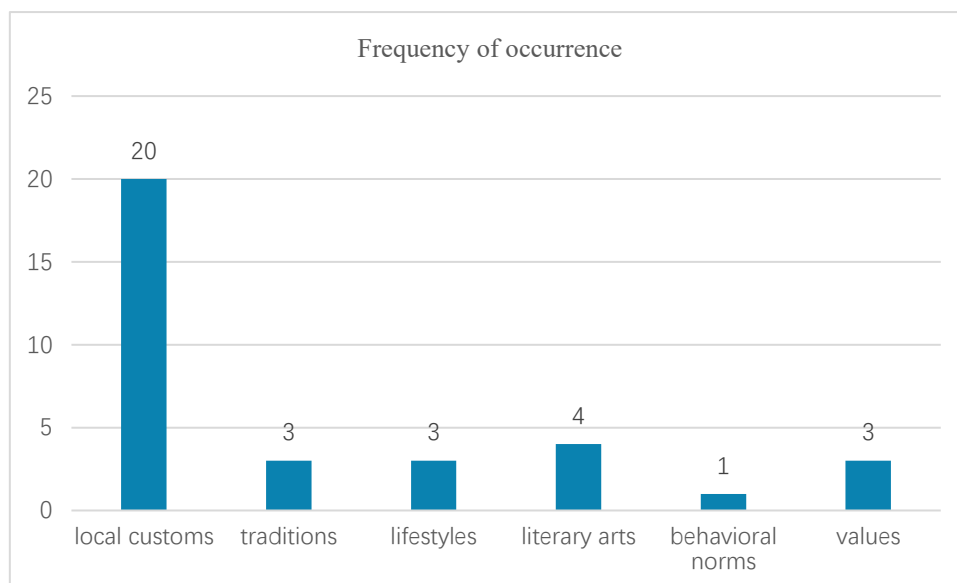


Fig.4 Frequency of occurrence of cultural content in Textbook D

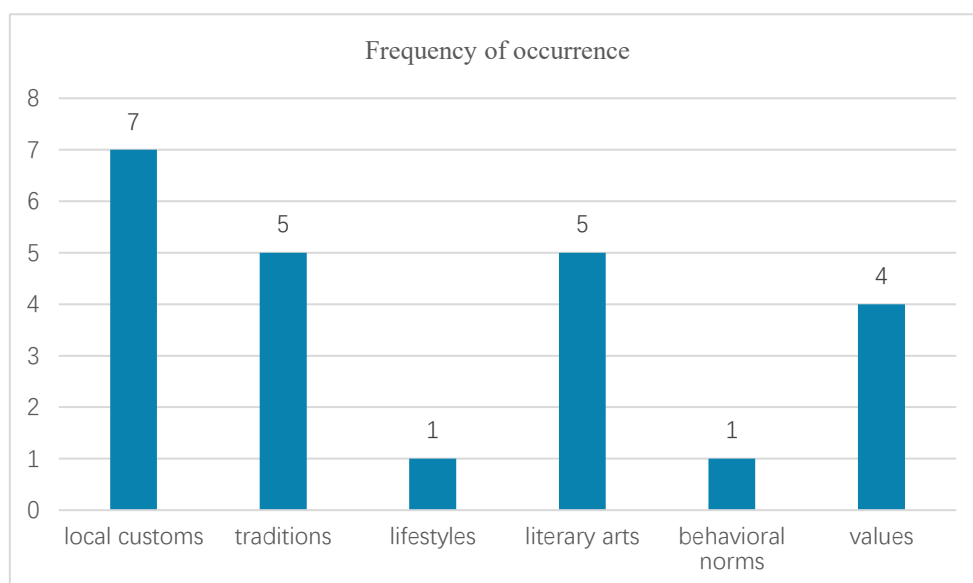


Fig.5 Frequency of occurrence of cultural content in Textbook E

Textbook F is published by a renowned American publishing company and consists of six volumes. Each unit in every volume focuses on introducing the history, geography, customs, or arts and culture of a specific country. The countries covered span across Asia, Africa, Latin America, Europe, and the Americas, while the cultural

content is incredibly diverse—encompassing history, geography, local traditions, customs, lifestyles, and more. The material is exceptionally rich and comprehensive. The bar chart below indicates the frequency of occurrence of cultural content across the six dimensions of Textbook F (See Figure 6).

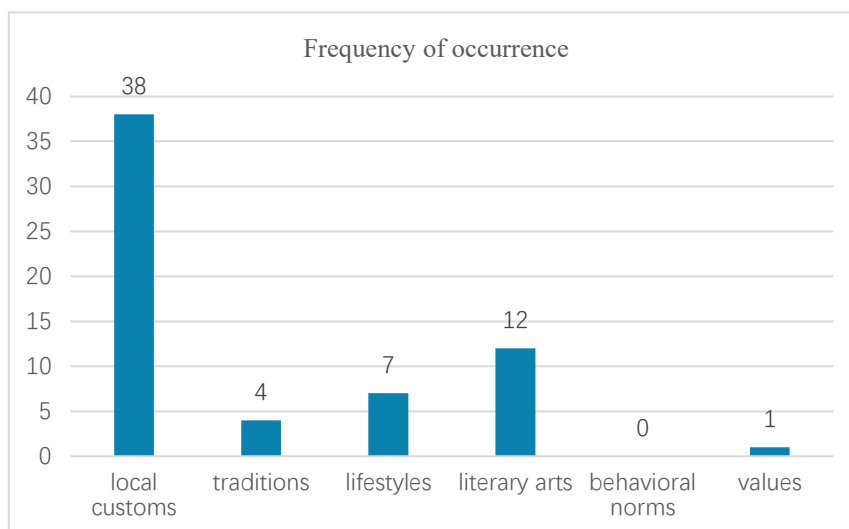


Fig.6 Frequency of occurrence of cultural content in Textbook F

Through analysis and comparison, we have provided an overview of these three foreign textbooks in the form of a table (See Table 2).

Table 2: Overview of Cultural Content in Foreign Textbooks

Item Textbook	Textbook D	Textbook E	Textbook F
Number of Volumes	6	5	6
Units per Volume	8	9	10
Start of Cultural Content	Volume 1 Unit 1 Christmas	Volume 1 Unit 2 Breakfast in America and Vietnam	Volume 1
Dedicated Cultural Section	Celebrations/Extra Culture	None	One Country per Unit
Frequency Rank	Local customs> Traditions>Literary arts >Lifestyles>others	Local customs> Traditions>Literary arts >Values >others	Local customs> Literary arts >Lifestyles > Traditions >others
Ways of Presentation	listen; read; story telling; project; exercise	listen; read; story telling; talk; exercises; activities	listen; read; talk; write; project; activities

4.2.2 Comparison of Cultural Content and Ways of Presentation in Foreign Textbooks

Through analysis and comparison, we have identified the following common characteristics in the cultural content presentation of the three sets of foreign textbooks.

(1) In terms of cultural content selection, they demonstrate greater openness and breadth, emphasizing world cultures and adopting a more global perspective.

(2) The methods of presenting cultural content are also diverse, including not only dialogues and short passages, but also exercises, games, and displays.

The distinctive features of the three foreign textbook series in cultural content presentation are as follows.

(1) Textbook D includes an “Extra Culture” section in each volume, focusing on traditional customs and lifestyles.

(2) Textbook E emphasizes local customs, practices, and cultural arts.

(3) Textbook F dedicates each unit in every volume to introducing a country's history, geography, local customs, or cultural arts, providing very rich content.

From the perspective of Chinese students, there are some problems concerning the cultural content presentation in these three sets of textbooks.

(1) The language difficulty is high, with proper nouns (e.g., names of people and places) posing a significant challenge for both students and teachers.

(2) The coverage of Chinese culture is very limited, and there are even some instances of misrepresentation.

(3) The three textbook series largely lack presentations of behavioral norms and rarely directly address values.

4.3 Results of Teacher Interviews

In parallel with textbook analysis, we interviewed eight frontline primary English teachers and English curriculum leaders from a district in Shanghai. The interviews explored their understanding of cultural awareness, its implementation in teaching and research, emphasis on Western culture, their interpretation of the new curriculum's cultural emphasis, how to promote cultural awareness through teaching practices, and personal development needs. The participating teachers freely shared their views and reflections on these questions. By organizing the interview records, we identified the current status and existing issues regarding the cultivation of cultural awareness in primary school English teaching.

First, over 60% of teachers focus more on fostering emotional attitudes and values during lessons, lacking clear awareness, plans, or methods for cultivating cultural awareness, which has not yet formed a systematic approach.

Second, about 30% of teachers have an insufficient understanding of the concept of cultural awareness, with some equating cultural content merely to introducing Western etiquette and festivals.

Third, approximately 20% of teachers delve deeper into the cultural aspects of the teaching materials, creating contextual settings and using resources such as images and videos to help students learn more about cultural content.

Fourth, regarding the cultural content in teaching materials, over 90% of teachers believe it is relatively limited, primarily introducing Western customs and

practices, especially Western festivals, while lacking content on excellent traditional Chinese culture or texts comparing Chinese and Western cultures.

Fifth, teachers unanimously acknowledged their theoretical shortcomings and expressed the need to strengthen their knowledge in relevant theoretical areas to better implement cultural awareness in teaching.

V. RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

Through a systematic review and comparison of domestic and international textbooks, we found that in terms of cultural awareness cultivation, domestic textbooks have incorporated it as an indispensable component in each unit. However, there are still shortcomings in both cultural content and presentation methods. Beyond the previously listed strengths and weaknesses in content and form, we summarize the gaps in cultural awareness cultivation in primary school English textbooks as follows.

First, there is an overemphasis on knowledge indoctrination rather than a deep understanding of cultural connotations. The approach tends to rely on rote memorization, neglecting the exploration of underlying values, ways of thinking, and other intrinsic qualities.

Second, superficial forms outweigh profound internalization. Although some units include content introducing China's excellent traditional culture, the overall design and implementation lack coherence and depth, often stopping at a shallow level. There is a tendency toward "activities without education", making it difficult for students to deeply grasp the core philosophies and humanistic spirit embedded in Chinese culture.

Third, passive imitation dominates over active innovation. In terms of cultural content presentation, the approaches across different textbooks are largely similar, with almost no particularly unique or novel methods. These issues provide room for improvement in future textbook development.

Additionally, through teacher interviews and other collaborative research, we've found that to effectively cultivate students' cultural awareness in English teaching, the first step is to enhance teachers' own cultural awareness and literacy. Due to differences in individual aptitude,

educational background, and working environments, improving teachers' cultural awareness should be a continuous process, progressing through three stages: cultural acceptance, cultural adaptation, and cultural internalization. Teachers need to adjust their roles, transitioning from mere language knowledge instructors to inheritors of their own culture and communicators of multiculturalism. On one hand, they should impart language knowledge to build a solid foundation; on the other, they should strengthen their understanding of their own culture while also learning about the cultures of English-speaking and non-English-speaking countries, fostering a multicultural perspective and striving to achieve the ideal of "mastering both Eastern and Western knowledge, knowing oneself and others".

VI. REFLECTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Currently, English textbooks in China have achieved a relatively comprehensive and mature presentation of linguistic knowledge such as grammar. However, the selection and organization of cultural content primarily focus on aspects like lifestyles and local customs, resulting in a narrow scope, superficial treatment, and lack of depth in cultural content. Additionally, the arrangement appears disorganized and lacks systematic coherence. Furthermore, the presentation of cultural content is mostly approached from the perspective of knowledge systems, necessitating further diversification in delivery methods. In light of these observations, we propose the following recommendations.

First, to strengthen teacher training. Teachers must first develop a clear understanding of the importance of cultivating students' cultural awareness. English classes serve as a vital channel for students to build correct cultural perspectives and provide the best opportunity to engage with foreign cultures. Therefore, English teachers must assume the responsibility of guiding students toward cultural awareness and helping them approach both Chinese and Western cultures with a rational mindset. In the context of globalization, the importance of English as a communication tool continues to grow. Relying solely on rote memorization and repetitive practice is insufficient. From the perspective of language development, it is clear

that language is closely intertwined with culture. The ultimate goal of English learning in the new era is not just to pass exams, but to lay a foundation for students' future lives and careers. In teaching, educators must adhere to the principle of integration—seamlessly combining the teaching of cultural knowledge with language practice. This helps avoid the disconnect between language instruction and cultural development, ensuring that cultural education and language ability are cultivated in tandem.

Second, to improve textbook writers' cultural literacy and vision. Textbook authors should possess strong cultural competence and a broad international perspective. They need to accurately grasp the characteristics and essence of foreign cultures, distill them into concrete components, and integrate them meaningfully into the textbooks. The goal is not only to help students understand foreign cultures through language learning but also to instill a sense of cultural confidence in their own heritage. Scientific integration of cultural content can activate students' thinking, broaden their horizons, and refresh their perspectives, enabling them to appreciate the richness of multicultural integration and develop a basic awareness of cultural comparison.

Third, to adopt a multidimensional cultural perspective. The cultural perspective in textbook design must break away from a Western-centric approach. Instead, content should be selected from multiple perspectives, including the intrinsic value of culture itself, the realities of students' cultural learning, and the mutual learning between Chinese and foreign cultures. The concept of "Chinese culture" must be clearly emphasized, which includes not only traditional culture but also revolutionary culture forged under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, as well as socialist culture guided by Marxism, which aims to cultivate citizens with ideals, moral character, culture, and discipline.

Fourth, to establish joint editorial teams of Chinese and foreign Experts. International cooperation is key in compiling textbooks that balance authenticity with local relevance. Original source materials should be appropriately combined with locally developed content. The selected language materials must align with the foreign

language curriculum guidelines and standards, match students' cognitive levels, and follow a logical and scientific sequencing of knowledge points, with reasonable distribution of key and difficult content.

Fifthly, to innovate language material presentation. Cultural content should not be confined to written text alone. Visual aids such as diagrams, layout design, and multimedia resources should also be considered for clarity and engagement. The integration of information technology and English teaching must be deepened. Textbooks should include audio materials and utilize modern technologies such as animations and sound effects to stimulate student interest. Additionally, digital learning resources should be provided to support textbook use. Students can choose content and methods that suit their individual needs, while also interacting with peers and teachers to share resources, exchange experiences, and showcase their learning outcomes.

Lastly, to develop supplementary exercises and reading materials. Given the cognitive, physiological, and psychological characteristics of primary school students, textbook content must remain appropriately concise, and cultural content should not occupy excessive space. Therefore, it is necessary to develop supplementary practice and reading materials that align with the textbooks. These materials can support students in using their free time to learn autonomously, gradually internalizing traditional Chinese culture. They should enable students to experience Chinese cultural values in real-life contexts and practice them through discovery and exploration.

It is our sacred mission as educators to guide students in comprehending the cultural essence of both Chinese and foreign traditions, comparing cultural differences, acquiring knowledge of diverse cultures, and actively disseminating Chinese culture. As engineers of the human soul in the new era, we have a long and challenging road ahead.

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Intersection of Ecology and Gender: An Analysis of Ecofeminist Perspectives in Arundhati Roy's Works

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Abstract— *Ecofeminism is a social and political movement that links the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature. Ecofeminists advocate for gender equality and environmental sustainability, emphasizing the interconnectedness of gender and ecological issues. They seek to challenge and transform the structures that perpetuate these forms of oppression, promoting a more harmonious relationship between humans and the natural world. Arundhati Roy, a prominent Indian author and activist, has explored the intersection of ecofeminism in her literary works, offering a unique perspective on the interconnectedness of gender, environment, and social justice. Her writings delve into the idea that the oppression of women and the exploitation of the environment are deeply intertwined, and she challenges patriarchal and capitalist systems that perpetuate both forms of injustice. This abstract will provide an overview of how Arundhati Roy's works and her essays, thus examine the ecofeminist discourse by portraying the struggles of marginalized women and the ecological crises they face. Roy's writing not only highlights the importance of recognizing and addressing these interconnected issues but also calls for collective action to create a more equitable and sustainable world. Through her evocative prose and compelling narratives, Arundhati Roy invites readers to contemplate the essential relationship between feminism and environmentalism, inspiring a deeper understanding of the need for social and ecological harmony.*



Keywords— *ecofeminism, nature, gender.*

Ecofeminism is a multifaceted social and political movement that explores the interconnectedness of environmental and feminist issues. It posits that the domination and exploitation of both women and nature are linked, stemming from patriarchal and capitalist structures. In the context of the environment, ecofeminism emphasizes the disproportionate impact of environmental degradation on women, particularly in developing countries where they often bear the brunt of water scarcity, deforestation, and climate change consequences. This perspective calls for gender-inclusive environmental policies. Vandana Shiva, in her book *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* says, "the worldview that causes environmental degradation and injustice is the same worldview that causes a culture of male domination, exploitation and inequality for women." Moreover, ecofeminism challenges the dominant worldview that treats nature as a resource to be exploited. It

advocates for a more harmonious relationship with the environment, drawing inspiration from indigenous cultures and their sustainable practices. Furthermore, ecofeminism critiques the aggressive pursuit of economic growth and consumerism, which often harm the planet. It calls for a shift towards eco-centric values that prioritize environmental preservation over profit. In a nutshell, ecofeminism is highly relevant in the environmental context as it sheds light on the intricate connections between gender-based oppression and environmental degradation. By recognizing and addressing these intersections, it provides a framework for building a more sustainable and equitable world.

Arundhati Roy is a renowned Indian author and activist known for her strong voice in environmental activism. She has been a prominent advocate for environmental causes, particularly in the context of India's

development and industrialization. Roy's environmental activism is closely linked to her concerns about social justice and human rights. She has consistently criticized large-scale development projects, such as dams and mining operations that have had detrimental effects on the environment and marginalized communities. Her book *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* also delves into these themes, highlighting the impact of industrialization on India's natural resources and people. One of her most significant environmental contributions has been her support for the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), a movement opposing the construction of the Sardar Sarovar Dam on the Narmada River. Roy's involvement brought international attention to the issue and raised awareness about the displacement of thousands of villagers and the ecological damage caused by such projects. Her writings, speeches, and activism have consistently underscored the interconnectedness of environmental issues with broader social and political concerns. She continues to be a powerful advocate for environmental justice in India and beyond.

Ecofeminism, a philosophy that explores the links between the oppression of women and the degradation of the environment, is a recurring theme in Arundhati Roy's writings. In her works, Roy often intertwines issues of gender, ecology, and social justice to illuminate the complex web of interconnected injustices. These are vital issues pertaining to ecofeminism in Arundhati Roy's writings:

Critique of Patriarchy and Environmental Destruction:

Roy highlights how patriarchal systems often parallel the exploitation and domination of both women and nature. She draws attention to the idea that societies that marginalize and oppress women are more likely to exploit and harm the environment. According to Ariel Salleh, "there is a parallel in men's thinking between their right to exploit nature and their exploitation of women."

Intersectionality: Roy's ecofeminist perspective is deeply intersectional. She argues that the most vulnerable communities, often comprising women, indigenous peoples, and marginalized groups, bear the brunt of environmental degradation. Her writings emphasize the importance of recognizing these intersections to address both gender and environmental injustices.

The Narmada Bachao Andolan: Her involvement in the NBA, a movement against dam construction and displacement, exemplifies ecofeminist principles. She highlights how large-scale development projects disproportionately affect women, who are often the primary caretakers of their families and communities. Her support for the displaced women of the Narmada Valley

underscores the connection between environmental activism and the struggle for women rights.

Roy celebrates the traditional ecological knowledge held by many indigenous and local communities. She argues that this knowledge, often passed down through generations of women, plays a crucial role in sustainable environmental practices. Roy's works champion the idea that these communities should be respected and involved in decisions concerning their environments.

In her novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Roy weaves ecofeminist themes into the narrative. The characters in the book are deeply connected to the land and nature, and their struggles for justice are intertwined with their relationship to the environment. Arundhati Roy's ecofeminist perspective serves as a powerful lens through which she critiques the existing power structures, advocating for a more inclusive and sustainable world. Her writings encourage readers to recognize the intimate connections between gender oppression and environmental degradation and to work towards a more equitable and ecologically balanced future.

In Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things*, the river, Meenachal, plays a central role in the story. It is not only a source of life but also a symbol of the female force and nature. The mistreatment and pollution of the river by the male-dominated industrial society represent the degradation of both women and the environment. Through characters like Ammu and Mammachi, Roy highlights the struggles of women in a patriarchal society. These women are often marginalized, and their stories reflect the oppression faced by women. This oppression can be paralleled with the exploitation of nature. The novel subtly suggests that the exploitation of women and the exploitation of the environment are interconnected. The patriarchal power structures that subjugate women also exploit nature for economic gain, without considering the long-term consequences. The breaking of traditional societal and familial norms in the novel mirrors the disruption of the natural order. The characters' actions, driven by societal expectations and prejudices, lead to personal and environmental destruction.

Ecofeminism, a social and political movement that combines ecological and feminist principles, has faced several challenges over the years. Critics argue that ecofeminism sometimes essentializes women and nature, reinforcing traditional gender roles. Ynestra King in Warren's *Ecofeminism* (1997), extends the distinction between feminism and ecofeminism as: "Ecofeminism's challenge of social domination extends beyond sex to social domination of all kinds, because the domination of sex, race, and class and the domination of nature are mutually

reinforcing” (Warren). It is important for ecofeminism to avoid oversimplifying the complex relationship between gender and the environment. Another challenge is achieving widespread acceptance and influence within mainstream environmental and feminist movements can be challenging. Also, translating ecofeminist ideas into concrete political action and policy changes can be difficult, as it often involves challenging existing power structures and economic systems. Despite these challenges, ecofeminism continues to evolve and adapt to address these issues and remain a relevant and important perspective within the broader environmental and feminist movements.

Arundhati Roy has offered a compelling perspective on the intersection of environmental issues and feminism. In her works, she underscores the urgent need to dismantle oppressive systems that exploit both women and nature. Roy's writings challenge us to reconsider our relationship with the environment and recognize that the exploitation of women and the exploitation of nature are interconnected. She argues that patriarchal and capitalist structures often exploit both female labour and the Earth's resources, leading to social and environmental injustices. In conclusion, Arundhati Roy's ecofeminist writings encourage us to reevaluate our values and systems, advocating for a more equitable and sustainable world. Her work serves as a reminder of the importance of recognizing the intertwined fates of women and the environment and calls for collective action to address these pressing issues. Through her powerful narratives and thought-provoking analysis, Roy contributes significantly to the ongoing discourse on ecofeminism and its potential to drive positive change in our world.

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Concrete Innocence: A Psychoanalytic Reading of *The Cement Garden*

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Abstract— Ian McEwan's *The Cement Garden* (1978) endures as a pivotal contribution to contemporary British literature, distinguished for its audacious engagement with themes of adolescence, trauma, familial disintegration, and social alienation. This expanded study reinterprets the novel with a heightened scholarly lens, interrogating its historical underpinnings, narrative design, symbolic richness, and psychoanalytic density. Through an interdisciplinary framework encompassing gender theory, psychoanalysis, and cultural studies, the analysis positions the novel as both an intimate portrait of familial collapse and an emblematic commentary on the fragmentation of modern society.



Keywords— *Familial Disintegration, Social Alienation, Psychoanalytic Criticism. Gender Identity, Symbolism and Narrative Form*

INTRODUCTION

Emerging at the juncture of Britain's economic uncertainty and cultural transformation of the late 1970s, *The Cement Garden* announced McEwan as a provocateur of psychological intensity and transgressive themes. Characterized by its stark minimalism and unsettling subject matter, the novel mirrors the sociopolitical landscape commonly referred to as the "Winter of Discontent." McEwan's personal and academic trajectory—shaped by a nomadic childhood and rigorous literary training at the University of East Anglia—fosters the distinctive precision and psychological realism that permeate the narrative. The novel's focus on domestic dissolution and emotional claustrophobia reflects broader societal anxieties about shifting gender roles, the fragility of family structures, and the erosion of communal identity in late capitalism.

Plot Overview and Structural Dynamics

The novel centers on four siblings—Julie, Jack, Sue, and Tom—whose lives are destabilized by the deaths of their parents in swift succession. Their drastic decision to encase their mother's corpse in cement marks the origin of

an unravelling moral and psychological landscape. The narrative is partitioned into two principal movements: the first narrates the immediate aftermath of bereavement, while the second charts a steady descent into isolation, taboo, and interpersonal malfunction. Jack's first-person narration, both intimate and strategically opaque, exerts significant control over the tone and interpretive possibilities of the novel. His perspective oscillates between clinical observation and emotional disorientation, rendering him an archetypal unreliable narrator. This structural containment, paired with the physical confinement of the siblings within the decaying house, constructs an atmosphere of intense psychological compression.

Themes: Isolation, Desire, Death, and Authority

Isolation is one of the predominant and most destabilizing forces in the text. The siblings' home, deteriorating amid urban desolation, becomes both a sanctuary of resistance and a site of psychological deterioration. Their withdrawal from society—necessitated by fear of institutional intervention—becomes a metaphorical severing from normative structures. Within this isolation, sexual awakenings and taboo desires emerge as distorted

expressions of emotional deprivation. The incestuous relationship between Jack and Julie, presented without overt moral commentary, is framed as an inevitable outgrowth of their emotional entanglement and loss of external boundaries.

Death and decay function not merely as narrative events but as symbolic conditions that permeate the siblings' emotional lives. The cement-encased body of the mother embodies a futile attempt to preserve stability and halt time. Simultaneously, the squalor within the home and recurring imagery of decomposition articulate the psychological disintegration accompanying unresolved trauma. The absence of parental authority results in unstable power negotiations among the siblings. Julie's ascension to domestic leadership unsettles traditional gender hierarchies, while Jack's struggles to assert dominance reveal the fragility of masculine identity in crises.

Character Analysis

Jack serves as the psychological nucleus of the novel. His introspective narration constructs a complex portrait of adolescent turmoil, repression, and desire. He experiences acute inner conflict—oscillating between the longing for intimacy and the impulse toward emotional withdrawal. Julie, conversely, embodies agency, resilience, and ambiguity. Her assumption of parental responsibilities, combined with her sexual autonomy, positions her as a figure who destabilizes conventional femininity. Sue's retreat into writing and observation represents passive resistance to trauma, while Tom's regression into infantile behavior and exploration of gender identity problematize developmental norms and highlight the novel's challenge to fixed identity categories.

Symbolism and Motifs

The novel's symbolic architecture is intricate and deliberate. The cement garden itself symbolizes entrapment, stagnation, and the human desire to artificially preserve what naturally decays. The house functions as a liminal space—a borderland between childhood and adulthood, order and chaos. Mirrors and reflections underscore Jack's fragmented selfhood, while persistent images of insects and decay highlight the omnipresence of death and the futility of resistance against entropy. The text's thematic blurring of gender roles and boundaries further intensifies its symbolic interrogation of identity fluidity.

Psychoanalytic and Gender-Theoretical Perspectives

Freudian analyses locate in the narrative a manifestation of unresolved Oedipal tension, particularly through Jack's conflicted desires and fixation on the maternal absence.

Lacanian frameworks elucidate Jack's strained negotiation between the imaginary and symbolic orders, especially in scenes involving self-recognition and desire. Kristevan theory offers additional insight, positioning the preserved maternal body as a representation of the pre-symbolic chora and the children's refusal to surrender the maternal realm of comfort and unity. Gender studies scholarship highlights the novel's interrogation of hegemonic masculinity, alternative relational structures, and the instability of socially constructed gender binaries.

Reception and Ethical Considerations

Upon its release, *The Cement Garden* elicited polarized reactions. Admirers praised McEwan's psychological acuity and narrative discipline, while detractors found its explicit content ethically troubling. Over time, however, the novel has achieved critical recognition as a seminal text in examinations of adolescence, trauma, and taboo representations. Its film adaptation further propelled debates surrounding censorship, morality, and the artistic responsibility of confronting difficult subjects without prescriptive judgments.

CONCLUSION

The Cement Garden endures as a haunting and intellectually provocative novel. Its intricate exploration of death, desire, identity, and the dissolution of social structures renders it a timeless commentary on human vulnerability in moments of crisis. McEwan's deliberate ambiguity and refusal of moral closure invite sustained scholarly interrogation across psychoanalytic, feminist, and cultural-critical frameworks. As contemporary societies continue to grapple with fragmentation, emotional isolation, and shifting family dynamics, the novel retains its relevance as a mirror reflecting the anxieties and uncertainties of modern existence.

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Phantom in the Mirror: Can Xue's Deconstruction of Self in *Old Floating Clouds*

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Abstract— *Old Floating Clouds* is a novella by contemporary Chinese writer Can Xue. Through the daily relationships between neighbors, husband and wife, father and daughter, lovers and mistresses, colleagues and friends, the novel shows that people have become caught in a web of jealously hating each other. The image of mirror plays an important role in the novel, and peep exists in every corner of the novel. In addition to being a mirror of objects, the human mind is also a kind of mirror in the interweaving of each other, and the relationship between self and others is constantly deconstructed and reshaped. This paper will use the “Mirror Stage” theory of psychoanalysis to explore and examine how the protagonists use the mirror to explore and examine themselves, and how they gradually become self-alienation and division in the mutual peeping with others. The mirror is not only a tool to peep at others, but also a reflection of the protagonists’ inner anxiety and self-examination. During the process of peeping, people try to find self-identification and comfort, but eventually fall into a deeper self-loss and spiritual dilemma.

Keywords— *Avant-garde, Mirror Stage Theory, Old Floating Clouds, Self-alienation, self-deconstruction*



I. INTRODUCTION

Old Floating Clouds is a masterpiece written by Can Xue, which first appeared in China magazine in 1986. Can Xue, an avant-garde writer in contemporary Chinese literature, is famous for her unique literary perspective and profound philosophy. Her works often break the traditional aesthetic concept and reveal the complexity of human nature and the cruelty of society with absurd and strange brushwork. In this novel, Can Xue builds a world full of indifference and hatred. Everyday relationships between neighbors, husband and wife, father and daughter, colleagues and friends become twisted and bizarre. People hated and guarded each other, as if they were plunged into an endless abyss of darkness. The behavior and

psychological state of the characters such as Xu Ruhua, Geng Shanwu, Mu Lan and Lao Kuang are vividly depicted by Can Xue.

This paper is inspired by the famous psychoanalyst Lacan’s Mirror Stage Theory, which explores the process by which the self is formed through the “mirror image”, that is, through the help of “the other”. The Mirror Stage Theory is divided into “front mirror period” and “mirror period”. The former focuses on the fact that infants before the age of 6 have not formed sensing and perception of the outside world, while the latter refers to the fact that from the age of 6 to 18 and later, infants begin to see their own images through the reflected surface of the mirror and begin to form self-awareness and self-identity. This

cognition is fragmented and has not yet formed a unified self-concept in the imaginary order. The baby sees the image in the mirror as a part of himself and builds an initial self-identity by interacting with the image in the mirror. As babies grow and develop language, they begin to enter the symbolism order. At this stage, infants not only realize that the image in the mirror is themselves, but also begin to understand the meaning of language, symbols, and social norms. Language, as a symbolic thing, provides infants with new tools for constructing self-concepts. They confirm their own identity and value through the eyes and words of others, and gradually form a more complex and stable self-identity to explore the relationship between themselves and the outside world. The real order is a realm that runs through the whole life process of the individual, and it transcends the boundary between the imaginary and the symbolic order. In real order, individuals not only recognize the mirror image as their own image, but also begin to explore deeply their self-worth, identity, and place in society. With constant growth and experience, the individual enters the real order, a constantly changing realm that contains elements that cannot be fully understood and controlled. In the real order, individuals are constantly faced with new challenges and opportunities and need to constantly adjust their self-identity and coping strategies (Lacan 3).

The mirror plays a crucial role in this novel, as it is used to peep at others. Mu Lan hangs a mirror on the paper mulberry tree to peep at the life of her neighbor Xu Ruhua. The two spy on each other through the mirror, and the mirror becomes a reflection of the character's inner anxiety, as well as the character's process of examining themselves and others, and the negative emotions and depressed feelings are amplified by the mirror. Self-consciousness is gradually alienated under the reflection of the mirror, and this alienation is not only reflected in the individual psychology, but also reflected in the distortion and repression of human nature by modern civilization. The others and themselves in the mirror are constantly distorted and reorganized, the characters' cognition of themselves and others is constantly changing, the dark and decadent things are gradually excavated from the depths of people's hearts, the self is alienated in this formation process, and people themselves are also

objectified in this endless review. The outside world and nature are no longer reassuring objective worlds here. It is one of the main culprits that lead to the alienation and objectification of the human self, and man gradually becomes one with the decaying nature. This paper will analyze Can Xue's use of the mirror and various deconstruction of the characters' selves from the aspects of mirror and self-seeking, mirror and the others, illusion in the mirror and self-fragmentation, and create the abnormal and broken dream-like spirit in the extremely dangerous state of interpersonal relations, and show the alienation of self-consciousness of people.

II. MIRROR AND SELF-SEEKING

The book *Old Floating Clouds* presents a depressing picture of the lives of the two couples, Mu Lan and Geng Shanwu, Lao Kuang and Xu Ruhua, who cross and peep at each other as neighbors. Everyone tries to find self through dependence on and resistance to others and things, but all end in failure. In the middle of their misplaced husband and wife relationship and lover relationship, it's unable to find positive mutual feelings.

Take Geng Shanwu and Xu Ruhua for example, they have been looking for self-identification like the "floating clouds", erratic, still young but tortured by life decline. Geng Shanwu attempts to stay away from his wife in the constant dream, mulberry tree flowers, dreams, cucumbers, worms, including Mu Lan are all like mirrors to peep at him, in the face of life, family, neighborhood and work pressure, life is snooping on him, he cursed the voyeur but was questioned by the street children "who you scold!", father-in-law's peep and hostility to him also gives him mental pressure; Xu Ruhua faces the pressure and surveillance of her husband, neighbors, mother-in-law and parents, and also feels powerless and suffocated in life, work and family. She is sensitive, silent and lonely, and tries to seek spiritual affirmation and resonance, but ultimately fails, and finally chooses to close herself. These two people are not only in the process of being constantly examined, but also become a peeper to peep at others. Mental and physical changes have occurred on them. Such two people have intersected, trying to find the shadow of self from each other. Geng Shanwu secretly sends death sparrow to Xu Ruhua, and the two people have the same

dream, only Geng Shanwu heard and cared about Xu Ruhua's muttering, they have the same sense of nothingness of life and the sense of loss of self, this may become their reason for meeting stealthily. The turtle in the dream struggled in the mire, the red fruit of the mulberry tree sucked up the spirit of the people, so that people drifted into the mire of life, the spirit could not settle. Just like the lives of Lao Kuang and Xu Ruhua, as well as the life of Mu Lan and Geng Shanwu, the latter's child is also erratic, with thinning hair and seemingly too old to be a child.

Mu Lan spies on Xu Ruhua's family through the mirror hanging on the mulberry tree, and Xu Ruhua's family spies on Mu Lan's family through the mirror in turn. The result of this unhealthy cycle is that when people observe others through the mirror, they define others and are also defined by others. The alienation and hostility between each other are intensified, and they not only fail to find each other's advantages, but also have more in-depth understanding of the shortcomings and darkness of each other's life. They gain a deeper understanding of the shortcomings and inadequacies of the other person's life, and this peeping eventually feeds into deeper issues in their own lives, inspiring boundless jealousy and malice. The perspective of "the man next the door" and "the woman next the door" constantly appears in the work, and the speaker constructs the other people with the speaker himself as the subject, which is a deliberate expression of the observation and peep of people to people, and gives people a sense of narrative subject monism in language, as if these characters are looking at each other in the mirror, and all have a common nature, like the division of a general subject.

Xu Ruhua's mother and Mu Lan both spy on Xu Ruhua's home, and Mu Lan says:

"Someone's disturbing all the neighbors. Pretending to be mysterious to show off her lofty character. Just think about it, and you'll see there's nothing but emptiness in her mind" (Can Xue 203).

Whether peering through a mirror or with a slip of paper, the surveillance of each other actually reflects the emptiness of the human spirit, or a twisted desire to control, to probe deeper, it's perhaps the distortion and control of the self. What tormented Xu Ruhua may not be

so much those flowers and other people as herself, she closes herself up, and her own existence is a torture in herself (Lei Jian 62). And Geng Shanwu is more illusory, he has a two-sided nature and is capable of insight into the nature of life and the cruelty of human nature. But in the face of the secular, he is extremely weak and wants to find his own self from others. He is a person who can "clear understanding of his own behavior", and this understanding also makes him "distinguish himself from other beings" (Can Xue 109). Can Xue once said: "Geng Shanwu is more superficial, his realm is always in the swing, not as hard and pure as Xu Ruhua" (Can Xue 110). These two individuals strive to find themselves and seek solace in one another, yet the very essence of their selves condemns their fate to tragedy. All the mirrors that spy on them --- and that they, in turn, use to spy on others --- weave together into a net. This net encloses the vain, wandering soul that resides within every person, a space where the self merges and eventually withers away, laying bare the inherent pain of existence.

III. MIRROR AND THE OTHERS

According to the theory of existentialist philosopher Heidegger, from the perspective of time latitude, the journey of life from birth to death can be marked with the following sections: "Having Been—Dasein—Potential Being—Death", in short, life is a kind of existence "born to death" (Heidegger 292-293). The world described by Can Xue is an alienated world. Geng Shanwu and Xu Ruhua are by no means alienated selves since their existence. When they come into this world, the people and surroundings around them are both the "others" who feel alien to them and the "others" as defined in Dasein. These others are a good interpretation of the concept of "hell is other people". For the two people, these others constantly exert mental pressure on them, peep at them like a mirror and peel off their shells, which is the cause of self-alienation. Fighting against such "others" ultimately leads to defeat and the loss of social identity; in turn, this self-alienation corrodes the individual's sense of self, reducing them to a terrifying phantom of their former self.

Xu Ruhua is terrified of her mother's peeping, and her mother becomes a dark shadow behind the tree, haunting her and leaving her a note to oppress her

spiritually. As her stress crystallizes, she begins to see phantoms and chooses to close herself off:

“Trembling as she arose, she opened a crack in the curtain with her finger. She saw a flickering shadow wrapped in black and seeming to grin hideously. Though both the door and the window were covered with iron bars, Ru-hua was frightened. Not daring to turn on the light, she lit her flashlight every now and then and peered under the bed, behind the door, on the ceiling, in fear her mother might hide in the most unexpected places” (Can Xue 202).

Geng Shanwu goes mad under the pressure of his wife and father-in-law. They look at him through the mirror of the examining mind, and think that he has been incompetent and insane, but the mirror works in both directions, Geng Shanwu sees them through their eyes, and also sees himself through them:

“ ‘ Why did you laugh at me?’ he asked later.

‘Because you’re a fool.’

‘And you?’

‘How can I be a fool? I couldn’t discover your foolishness if I were a fool.’

‘I see.’

He’d seen through her, but she didn’t know it. She still played the old tricks. He felt delighted to have laid her bare” (Can Xue 211).

This dialogue makes it impossible to tell who the fool is and deconstructs the narrative logic of the other and the self. The line between the other and the self becomes blurred (Shoshana & Liang Xiaodong 54). If Geng Shanwu saw through his wife, how could he be a fool? Wasn’t Mu Lan just as foolish for failing to realize her husband had seen through her?

No one pays heed to this ambiguous extramarital relationship, and the people around them are themselves in a bizarre mental state. Lao Kuang depends on and fears his mother, and the mother seems to have become his shackles; Mu Lan peers darkly into Xu Ruhua’s life, surrounded by jealousy, anxiety and absurd emotions; Mu Lan’s father is a scoundrel, and is cold and mean to his daughter and son-in-law, demanding money from them and spying on their lives; Xu Ruhua’s mother, haunted by the pain of her own past misfortunes, projects that suffering onto her daughter --- who failed to live up to her expectation of becoming an engineer. She fixes her gaze on Xu Ruhua

relentlessly, weighing heavily on her life and constricting her existence. The two of Geng and Xu are under scrutiny and pressure from their families and neighbors, and these “others” around them reflect their own mental trauma to the two through the mirror. In the process of judging and examining each other and themselves, the two can’t see each other and themselves clearly, one of them has closed herself, and the other has become an illusory phantom in the mirror.

Xu Ruhua’s impression of Geng Shanwu is:

“Looking at her familiar wrinkled body in the mirror, she vaguely recalled the long, thin figure of the man. In her memory his image was too elusive to catch” (Can Xue 214).

These two people’s self-alienation occurs under the prying eyes of others, they cannot meet the requirements of others, nor can they integrate into the needs of society. They try to form themselves with the help of these external things but eventually become an old empty shell, which reflects the persistent mental harassment that haunts every character throughout the novel. Anxiety becomes the only thing that can be determined, but for all people, the source and right of anxiety can not be grasp, it is those unfortunate past and experience left these wounds, the past has become the past, but the spiritual trauma continues to exist. People look at others through the mirror, each person is the other, each person’s self in the process of defining others has been blurred, through the mirror’s peeping, the boundary between the other and the self becomes blurred, too. The peeper is both the other and the self-observer. As people spy on others, they also look at themselves. This dual identity makes their cognition of the other and the self confused and ambiguous.

Because of the existence of peeping, the relationship between the other and the self becomes tense and antagonistic. The long-term peeping and anti-peeping behavior led to self-sealing and shrinking, and Xu Ruhua gradually closes herself up and no longer communicates with others under the long-term peeping and being peeped at. Her spiritual world has become barren and empty, and finally goes to the fate of death. Geng Shanwu also gradually loses himself in this environment, becoming depressed and powerless.

IV. ILLUSION IN THE MIRROR AND SELF-FRAGMENTATION

Mu Lan peers into the life of her neighbor Xu Ruhua through a mirror, and Xu Ruhua and her family in the mirror become the objects of her peeping. This kind of peeping is itself a kind of illusion, because the peepers always interprets the life of the person that been peeped through their own subjective perspectives. After Xu Ruhua learned that she was peeped at, her life seemed to become a stage, and all her actions were amplified and distorted in the mirror. This sense of being peeped at makes her feel uneasy and anxious, which is further exacerbated by the phantoms in the mirror. From the perspectives of different characters, the others become an illusory illusion: in Xu Ruhua's eyes, Lao Kuang and Geng Shanwu are "things like shadows", and Xu Ruhua feels that she is a dry empty shell covered with reed stalks; Geng Shanwu can clearly perceive the cruel nature of human nature in his wife as well as others who laugh at him; Mu Lan despises Geng's incompetence and coldly peeps at his privacy.

In addition, there are many illusory scenes in the perspectives of the characters, such as the white flowers, the red mulberry with full juice, the withered leaves, the reed stalks bursting inside the body, and the mosquitoes flying around. The description and repeated appearance of these images make people shocked and the hair stands on end. The dream also becomes a kind of mirror in the text, Geng Shanwu's dream, and the above various mirage-like scenes are all confused by the fragments of speech. People seem that have never really been able to communicate in real sense in the novel, words weave a web of terror and anxiety, and people prey on each other, constantly moving, hiding, sneaking, fleeing from the peeping eyes in windows, cracks in doors, holes in walls, and mirrors (Shoshana & Liang Xiaodong 54).

Therefore, under this kind of depiction and presentation, the core ideas of Can Xue are gradually revealed, the alienated and broken selves of each character are revealed, and people's spirits are gradually alienated in the process of spying on others. Freud, one of the founder of psychoanalysis, once proposed that the potential dream has always been constrained by the ego, and only when the person is in the state of sleep, the "ego" as the inspector partially relinquishes its control over brain activity,

allowing the forbidden and suppressed wishes to come to the level of consciousness in a disguised and distorted form. Some emotions and desires find distorted expression in dreams, where the "subconscious" lurking deep within the mind comes to the fore --- and this very process plays a crucial role in the formation of the self. But the broken language of Can Xue and the broken description of the subconscious make one realize that the self has been distorted, broken, and dried up for the characters in the book. Milan Kundera said that novel examines not reality, but existence. Existence is not what has happened; existence belongs to the realm of human possibility, which all that human beings can become. In the fictional reality constructed by Can Xue, people's physical existence is not the focus of attention; instead, her relentless exploration lies in the shaping of the spiritual realm. The existence and fragmentation of the self are repeatedly emphasized to reflect the alienation of human nature in modern society, the estrangement and confrontation between individuals, the noisy and perilous social environment, and the absurdity of the self as well as its struggle to persist. In this way, Can Xue's novels embody the profound implication of "hell is other people."

V. CONCLUSION

Can Xue said that the characters in her novels are the result of her personal personality split, self-contradictory creations. But pay attention to one thing: the most ragged, the most "negative" characters are often the most essential, the deepest, the characters with the most passion. There are many characters in the novel, and the central character is not obvious. Can Xue's portrayal of the characters is just like describing the subconscious mind, which is complex and changeable, and the external flesh of the characters are not important. The generally broken spiritual world connects these characters together, reflecting a universal spiritual alienation. Can Xue integrates the image that she wants to reflect in her inner world into her work, so that every character has this imprint, and they are like the different sides of one subject, and finally returns to the illusory spiritual world. Too artistic expression makes Can Xue's works have a certain gap with the real context of people's lives. She likes to equate everything in her novels directly with arts, which should be the biggest problem in

Can Xue's novel criticism that it is difficult to communicate and dialogue with people (Wang Tianqiao 57). However, it is undeniable that Can Xue has achieved success in showing the self-alienation of people in modern society. Many writers use literature as inspiration to awaken humanity and self. For example, Gong Zizhen, Lu Xun and others tried to let people "gaze at one's own reflection in the mirror" to explore the obscured and distorted self through literature, so as to awaken people's inner humanity. Literature is like a mirror: in any era, it reflects others and allows people to see themselves, while the phantoms in the mirror --- both others and the self --- awaken people's attention to the alienated and traumatized spiritual world.

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The Battle of Names and the Self in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices*

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Abstract— Names and identity are inextricably linked and have a profound impact on an individual. Chitra Banerjee has depicted this link in her novel, *Mistress of Spices*, through the focal character Tilo. Tilo has struggled with identity since birth. Throughout each phase of her life, she's been given a new name. This research paper aims to explore the various names, their significance, and identities associated with Tilo. Each of her names reflects a new persona of hers. This paper also analyses Tilo's cognitive changes during the transformations. Her journey is perceived as a battle that she fights for her name and identity. Hence, the battle between her physical and emotional worlds, and her journey towards finding her true self, is also addressed.



Keywords— ambivalence, double consciousness, identity, naming, self-discovery

I. INTRODUCTION

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, a well-known Indian-American author, is known for her enchanting novels. Her works touch on themes like identity, magic, culture, and womanhood. Originally from Kolkata, India, she moved to the United States for her further studies. She later found success as a writer. She is one of the noted literary personalities of Indian Diasporic writers. Her works convey a blend of both Eastern and Western influences that shape her literary identity. Among her notable works is *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), an adored novel recognised and loved for its magical storytelling and vivid depiction of Indian life in diaspora. The novel unfolds in a magical spice shop settled in Oakland, California. From there, we follow the journey of Tilo. She is the focal character of the novel and a mystical woman. She can influence and heal people through the magical spices. Hence, she is known as the Mistress of Spices.

Through the adventures of Tilo and the layered plot of the novel, Divakaruni explores themes of identity, tradition, and the challenges faced by immigrants while living in diaspora. The recurring motif throughout the novel is Identity. Throughout the novel, we see Tilo battling and struggling for her name and identity. This pursuit of a sense of self aligns with the psychological studies of identity. Erik

Erikson in *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (1968) says that when people cannot accept the roles given to them, they may take on a “negative identity.” This leads to confusion about the self. Tilo in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* can be seen in this light. Every name she carries shows both hope and pain. As Nayan Tara, she is seen as a miracle child. As Bhagyavati, she is tied to fate. As Tilottama, she is valued for her beauty but also trapped by it. As Tilo, she is bound to the spices and strict rules. These names are given to her by others. They never let her feel whole. Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) explains how people wear masks created by society. These masks hide the true self. Such masks are also worn by Tilo. Each name becomes a mask that shapes her and, at the same time, distances her from her own wishes. She wants to be free and get loved, but feels restrained by obligation and custom. Stuart Hall in *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* (1990) explains that identity is not fixed. It is continually changing. It gets constantly molded by the time and situation. This helps us see Tilo's story not only as confusion but also as growth. Her names are not only masks but also stages in her becoming. Through Erikson, we see her struggle. Through Fanon, we see her alienation. Through Hall, we see her shifting identity, still alive and still being made. Placed side by side, it is revealed that Tilo's identity is a transformative one. It is not stable. Identity is

both “a matter of becoming” and “of being” (Hall 1990, 225). In the novel, Tilo embodies Stuart Hall’s notion of dynamic identity. According to Hall, identity is seen as both a process of becoming and a state of being. This is also visible in the case of Tilo, through her various names and identities. Each name given to her reflects a distinct facet of her tangled identity. She undergoes several personal transformations. “Tilo, the Mistress of Spices, has many disguises and names that reveal her multiple identities.” (Abirami S. and Nirmala, 2016: 259)

Just as Hall suggests, Tilo’s consciousness mirrors this complication by revealing desires that are conflicting. Tilo’s character emerges as an individual who is connected very closely with questions of identity, consciousness, and ambivalence. Being the Mistress of Spices and possessing all the magical abilities, she faces battles within herself. There are mixed feelings and emotions inside her mind. She has her duties as the Mistress of Spices, and at the same time, the heart of a common human being living in diaspora. She wants to fulfil her responsibilities, but at the same time wants to be in her true self. While she adores being the guardian of the ancient, traditional and cultural heritage, she harbors uncertainty about her identity. Divakaruni artfully uses the metaphor of life and identity while symbolically comparing it to the world of women. The progressive, ever-changing nature of spices also mirrors the constant evolution and transformation within her life. It symbolizes the creation of something new and fresh with every use, just like spices. This can be analysed aptly through the work of Gupta and Sharma-

“On one hand, spices provide her with a means to heal herself and others, facilitating emotional and physical recovery. Each spice holds the potential for empowerment, allowing her to foster community bonds and preserve cultural identity amidst the struggles of exile. However, this very connection to spices also becomes a reminder of Tilo’s inability to fully embrace her new identity.” (Gupta Shalu and Sharma Devendra Kumar, 2025: e118)

The enduring quest for self-discovery in Tilo’s character serves as a keystone of human existence across the ages. Her identity evolves through phases of struggles, crisis and uncertainty. This reflects the universal quest for self-understanding. She feels confused about who she is because her names and personalities keep changing. Each name she gets makes her act differently, and she doesn’t know which one is really her. Whether she is Nayan Tara, Bhagyavati, Tilottama, or Maya, she feels like she is playing a different role. This makes her feel ambivalent about herself. Moreover, the powers she possesses make things even more confusing. Tilo’s journey is about trying to figure out who she truly is among all these different versions of herself. “Who was I? I could not say. Already my name had faded in the rising island sun, like a star from a night that has passed away.” (Divakaruni 1997, 33) Tilo’s character is like

a puzzle when it comes to understanding who she really is and what she wants. This mirrors Abrams and Hogg’s idea- “Identity is people’s concepts of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others” (Abrams and Hogg 1988, 2). During an identity crisis, individuals may resort to creating comforting illusions, rationalizing their shortcomings, reinventing themselves, or even facing existential extinction. The concept of identity is closely interconnected with the notion of the self. Tilo is caught between two worlds: one where she has special powers as the Mistress of Spices, and the other where she just wants to find love and happiness like anyone else. When Tilo meets, observes and listens to other people, it is more she learns about herself. In a crisis of identity, she looks for self-discovery. She learns about her strengths and what really matters to her. The identity of Tilo is a tangled and complicated one. This can be seen through the numerous names she possessed throughout her journey. Tilo’s confused identities, firstly as Nayan Tara and then Bhagyavati, Tilo, and Maya convey the identity crisis and sense of self-discovery at the same time. As Densingh observes in his paper “New Names, New Identities of Tilo in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s *The Mistress of Spices*” -

“In the novel, Tilo has many disguises and she keeps on changing her names throughout the novel, making clear the complex problem of identity crisis that the Indian try to cope with in a foreign land. She has been changing her name from Nayan Tara as a good daughter then to Bhagyavati during her stay with the pirates then to Tilo and finally Maya when she finds her love. Tilo manages to define herself at the very end of the novel as “Maya”, a Hindu term that defines the everyday world of desire, pain and joy. “Maya” represents the illusionary power of the world.” (Densingh, 2016: 178)

In the novel, Tilo adopts different disguises and names. This reflects the major challenge faced by Indians living in a foreign land. This might lead to confronting their sense of self. Tilo’s transformations illustrate the battle between her true identity and the roles she must adopt to support others. At the outset of the novel, when we are introduced to Tilo, we get a glimpse of the magical world she inhabits. Divakaruni portrays Tilo as a mysterious and puzzling figure. Someone who is inseparably connected to the essence of spices and gifted with remarkable abilities. We also come to know that her journey through life is marked by difficult times and the discovery of multiple identities. Through her experiences, we witness her struggles, growth, and the complexities of her existence. Additionally, we come to understand how Tilo faces ambivalence and straddles between double consciousness. She tries to balance her mystical duties as Mistress of Spices with personal desires with mindfulness. The several names of Tilo represent different aspects of her character and powers. Tilo was born in a village and she was named Nayan Tara. Then the pirates carry her away and then she is called

'Bhagyavati'. When she decides to reach the island, the snakes name her 'Sarpakanya'. To become Mistress of Spices, she changed her name to Tilo, meaning 'a life giver and a restorer of health and hope'. She has to change her identities many times in order to arrive at a final definition of her selfhood. This can be analysed through the following: "Fire is the beginning of Nayanara's new phase of life. She served as a pirate queen for a few years, and her name was Bhagyavathi. She reviews her life as a pirate queen and wants to know her dream and give another calling thinking about the sea. As a result, the underwater snake came up with a typhoon in the water she was rescued and saved. Water represents the mystery of creation as a symbol of life, cleaning and rebirth. Whereas the life of Nayanara cleanses, she revealed First Mother and her novice when she opened her eyes. The character First Mother means as savior and guru, according to Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. First Mother who rescued Nayanara from water and called her Tilottama, meaning life-giving, health-restoring, and hope." (Rajeswari R., Suganya A. 2019, 30). This research paper analyses in depth the battle and significance of these names in Tilo's life, and how they shape her identity.

II. NAYAN TARA

Tilo's identity is a dynamic one. It can be analysed through the variety of names she was assigned during each new phase of her life. Every name holds a significant meaning that influences her identity. At the initial phase of her life, i.e., on her birth, she was named by her parents- "Nayan Tara, Star of the Eye" (Divakaruni 1997, 7). Being born as the third daughter to a family with financial struggles, she was seen as a burden. This led to an array of battles for her. She was neglected by her parents and sought love and acceptance. She wanted to do something meaningful in her life so that she could get acceptance. With the ability to see the future, she was loved by the villagers, but still lacked love from her family. Her name, Nayan Tara, holds great significance. It symbolises her vision and power to see and tell the future of people. It conveys her childhood journey. This name also echoes Tilo's celestial and otherworldly abilities. Nayan Tara, the name suggests the intuitions and insights that Tilo possessed. Though the significance of this name goes beyond its denotative meaning. The personal wishes, aspirations, and desires of Tilo are also symbolised through this name. It condenses to the fulfilment, happiness, and satisfaction Tilo wants in her life. A direction that she wants in her life is to chase love and joy. However, the irony is that despite being called 'Star of the Eye', she is often neglected by her family and community. The name 'Nayan Tara' for Tilo isn't just a name. It holds the foundations of Tilo's overall identity throughout her journey.

It is believed that names are often linked with destiny. Hence is the case with Tilo's journey with multiple names and identities. As she proceeds in life with her first name,

Nayan Tara, she undergoes the cognitive transformations too. Being Nayan Tara, she gains confidence. She feels optimistic and begins to care for herself. She also understands how she has built an identity for herself with her ability to tell the future. An identity with which she is known to others, and how society perceives her. With this name, Tilo built an identity for herself, but was still not fully aware of herself. This was just the initial phase, which later led to a big battle of identity and names.

III. BHAGYAVATI

In the second important phase of life, Tilo is known by the name 'Bhagyavati'. It holds a profound importance in shaping her identity. Through this name, she comes to understand her place in the world. The talents she possessed were not considered greatly by the family and villagers. Eventually, one day, pirates raided her village. They kidnapped her and renamed her 'Bhagyavati'. They believed that she could bring them luck by telling them the future and the path to hidden treasures. Tilo narrates this part of her life as an ironic one. "The pirate chief's voice lifted above dying moans, giving me in awful irony my new name. Bhagyavati, Bringer of Luck, for so I was to be for them." (Divakaruni 1997, 19) Tilo felt far removed from her destiny while she resided on the ship with pirates. She experiences an identity crisis. This can be analysed through the following lines- "Nights I walked the decks alone and sleepless, I Bhagyavati, Sorceress, Pirate queen, bringer of luck and death..." (Divakaruni 1997, 20)

The relevance of the name Bhagyavati is closely connected to Tilo's journey of self-discovery. Through this phase, she tries to understand her destiny. This name symbolises a fortunate person or one with good fortune. The pirates have faith in Tilo's magical powers. They think that her presence will lead them to their destined fortunes and treasures. Hence, they associate her name with their ambitions for treasure. However, Tilo herself feels disconnected from this perception of her role. She experiences an identity crisis as well as disconnection from her purpose in life. The name Bhagyavati reveals the importance of destiny and fate in Tilo's life. During this phase, Tilo battles with two ideas in her mind. Whether her life and identity were already decided or if she could make destiny on her own. But when it comes to the significance of the name, it comes with an irony here, too. Being in the identity of Bhagyavati, Tilo is perceived to tell the future of people, but in her own case, she is unable to do so. She is baffled. She is seen as someone who brings luck to others, but on the other hand, she wants to regulate her future. Her transformation from Nayan Tara to Bhagyavati has a huge impact on her mental processes. While she felt confident and embraced her evolving identity as Nayan Tara, she lost it all as Bhagyavati. With the identity of Bhagyavati (after abduction), she is seen as baffled, underconfident, and

Pessimistic in thoughts. She fights a battle with her own thoughts and the way pirates perceive her for their benefit. Tilo's identity as Bhagyavati lasted for a short time, but had a lasting impact on her mind.

IV. TILOTTAMA

The successful escape from the pirates led Bhagyavati to arrive at a magical island. A place where she was renamed for the third time as Tilo. "My name which is Tilo, short for Tilottama, for I am named after the sun-burnished sesame seed, spice of nourishment." (Divakaruni 1997, 5) This name signifies the magical powers Tilo possesses over the spices. Becoming the Mistress of Spices, after coming out of Shampati's fire, Tilottama represents a profound transformation. "And now she writes my new name on my forehead. My Mistress name finally and forever, after so many changes in who I am. My true name that I am never to tell to any but the sisterhood." (Divakaruni 1997, 43)

'Tilottama', the name carries multiple layers of meaning. It serves as a replication of Tilo's lively character and aims. Following Hindu mythology, Tilottama was the most elegant of the dancers in Lord Indra's court. Indra is observed as the King of the gods. Tilottama is renowned for her beauty and grace. This name associates Tilo with elegance, beauty, and divine presence. It is aligned with the self-discovery of Tilo. When she chooses this name for herself, it shows that she is ready to build her own identity now. With this new identity, she hopes for healing and happiness. Tilo, the name mirrors the optimistic attitude of Tilo to discover her true self and inner beauty. Tilo embraces her mystical powers and is excited to guide and heal people. When she covers herself in this new identity, she is transformed into an old woman (physically). She is now the Mistress of Spices in Oakland, California. Tilo lives a disguised life over there, helping and supporting people in survival in the distant land. She also uses her ability to tell the fortune of people, along with being the Mistress of Spices. She chooses herself a relevant name, Tilottama (Tilo). But she is also hinted at by the First Mother about the complications of her new and evolving identity. Firstly, Tilo enjoys her new identity, being the Mistress of Spices, observing, listening and healing people. But soon she realises the boundaries she has agreed on. It can be clearly noticed through the words of Rajeswari R., and Suganya A.- "Tilo finds herself embroiled in the Spice Mistress ' rules and regulations." (32) She understands that her personal desires should also be prioritized. With this identity, she is restricted to love, or she'll have to lose her powers forever. She regrets this identity of hers once she starts loving Raven. She again thinks of changing her identity. She undergoes the cognitive changes, earlier happy, empathetic, energetic, hopeful and confident. Later, turning into questionable life choices. She also faces physical and mental battles throughout her journey.

V. MAYA

"Tilo has been given the name Maya, which is a name with roots in both India and the United States. After going by several different names throughout the course of the novel, including Nayan Tara, Bhagyavati, Tilo, and Tilottoama, the protagonist finally settles on Maya as her new name at the end of the book." (Kumar T., Jayshankar A.G. 2022, c514)

Approaching the end of the novel's plot, an earthquake shakes the foundations of Tilo's world. It catalyzes change, encouraging Tilo to reassess her identity. Tilo experiences the identity transformation for the last time. This time, she chooses herself as 'Maya', referring to illusions. This transformation from Tilo to Maya symbolises her desire to start afresh. "Maya is a name that is widely used in both of the countries that she is interested in living in." (Kumar T., Jayshankar A.G. 2022, c514). Through this new identity, she sheds the previous one and the boundaries associated with it. She leaves behind the duties and powers. By choosing herself as Maya, she tries to regain the identity she had been longing for. Maya was an identity to define herself. The deceptions of Tilo's experiences till now in her life, especially with identity and names, are left behind with this new identity. Thus, the name Maya stands for the renewal and personal growth of Tilo. With this identity comes a new version of Tilo. Now she is a person who is not restricted by any norms.

Being covered in the identity of Maya, her way of perceiving herself also changes. With this name and identity, she envisions a future with Raven. As Maya, she evolves into a woman who has accepted her past and found fulfilment in her present. The relevance of this new name is all about the new change and growth in Tilo's life. Unlike Tilo, Maya has a resilient, new, optimistic, and more confident attitude. This helps her to be Maya.

In the novel, Tilo's names teach us a lot about how identity and names are linked. Each name she has represents a different part of her story and how she sees herself. They show us how names can affect how people see us and how we see ourselves. Tilo's journey with her names shows that who we are isn't set in stone; it's something we can change and figure out as we go along. The four different names of Tilo in *The Mistress of Spices* play a profound role in shaping her identity and journey of self-discovery. Tilo faces an identity crisis throughout her life. "They do not know this, my customers, nor that earlier I had other names. Sometimes it fills me with a heaviness, lack of black ice, when I think that across the entire length of this land not one person knows who I am." (Divakaruni 1997, 5)

VI. COGNITIVE SHIFTS IN TILO'S MIND BETWEEN DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS AND AMBIVALENCE

Tilo's identity in *The Mistress of Spices* can be seen through many theories that explain how a self is formed and changed. Freud in *The Ego and the Id* (1923) shows that the self is divided, and this can be felt in Tilo's mind, where duty, desire, and fear often fight with each other. Erik Erikson in *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (1968) speaks about identity confusion, and Tilo goes through this whenever her name changes. Tilo never finds a tranquil state of mind. Every single name comes with new duties. Stuart Hall in *Questions of Cultural Identity* (1996) tells us that identity is never fixed but always in process. This is true for Tilo. She moves from Tilottama to Tilo, and then to a woman who wishes for love and freedom. Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994) speaks about ambivalence, and Tilo's life is full of it. She is uncertain between ritual and yearning, amid magic and humanoid life. Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) shows how people feel divided when they try to live between two cultures. Tilo has the exact same feelings. Her thoughts are divided on one side, where she remains loyal and dutiful to the spices. On the other hand, when she desires the loveful life with Raven. Her names mark these shifts. Sometimes they give her strength. Sometimes they cause doubt. In her mind, a slow change takes place. She moves from obedience to questioning, from silence to voice. Her identity is never one thing, but many. It is broken, shifting, and rebuilt again. In this way, Tilo's journey feels close to many women and migrants who live between worlds and learn to shape themselves in the space of conflict. These theories of shifting identity come together in Du Bois's theory of double consciousness. Tilo's journey in *The Mistress of Spices* can be seen through the idea of double consciousness, first spoken of by W. E. B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). One soul speaks in the voice of the self. The other repeats the voice of the world. This is what Tilo feels. Her names make this inner struggle sharper. As Tilottama, she is trained to obey and surrender. As Tilo, she serves the spices with care, yet her heart begins to stir with quiet desires. When Raven enters her life, another self-rises. That self-wishes to leave the shop and live as an ordinary woman. None of these selves can silence the others. They press against one another, leaving her torn. In her mind, two voices argue. One voice keeps reminding her about her vows and duties to the spices. The other tempts her with the warmth of love and the chance of another life. Her shop is both a shelter and a cage. Through this struggle, her self begins to change. She moves slowly from silence to voice, from blind obedience to questioning. Her identity does not stay fixed. It splits, it gets fractured, but still tries to adapt and adjust and finally reconstructs. Tilo, through her shifting identity, understands that the self is not just one thing, but it consists of many and is

transformative. This is one of the reasons why Tilo's life mirrors the lives of diverse women and migrants. To live between two worlds is to carry two minds. To stand between tradition and freedom is to feel divided within. It is painful, but it also creates strength. Tilo lives with this divide. From it, she slowly shapes a new self. She feels hurt, yet she is alive. She feels torn, yet she still holds herself together. Her divided self shapes not only her identity but also the shifts in her thinking and perception.

The battle of names and the self in Tilo's life affects her mind, and we notice cognitive changes in her character. Tilo experiences several changes in her mindset, from sacrificing to accepting and then questioning her identity. Firstly, detaching herself from the materialistic world, illusions, love, and joy, and then attaching herself to these. There is a shift in her thought process in each new phase. If we analyse it from the beginning to the end, she becomes resistant from obedient. Earlier, she used to remain silent, but towards the end, she raised her voice for herself. This shift in Tilo's thought process can be sensed all through her journey.

It is also analysed that Tilo battles with ambivalence and a sense of double consciousness, resulting from the manifold names and identity. Both concepts are related to the cognitive processes and emotions. Ambivalence is a feeling that is often explored in the characters of diaspora novels. It is kind of a mixed feeling, where the individual keeps hanging between the two cultures and emotions. People who experience this are split between the two. Tilo keeps oscillating between the Indian and American cultures and exhibits mixed feelings. She is rooted in the Indian culture and tradition, while she adores the American one. She wants to adopt the free American lifestyle, and doesn't want to leave her Indian roots. Tilo tries to balance her Indian traditions with modern ways. As the Mistress of Spices, her struggle is real. She is pulled in two directions. She wants to get both things done; do her duties and live a life with Raven, free of boundaries. Her mindset and identity are always unsure, which reflects the ambivalence.

Tilo, as a diaspora subject, fits in the idea of double consciousness given by W.E.B. Du Bois. It is "A twoness in one body; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings" (Bois 2007, 3). Characters in diaspora often face this feeling of living in two worlds. They have dual cultural identities. The case is the same with Tilo. Her contradictory identities make her question about her true self. She sees herself through the eyes of Indian traditions and also through the American expectations. She has a split awareness of herself. She is neither fully Indian nor an American. The cognitive growth of Tilo is shaped by this simultaneous belonging and non-belonging. This can be said that Tilo's identity is not a fixed one, but an identity in progress with inconsistency. "Identity is not a fixed point

but an ambivalent point. Identity is also the relationship of the Other to oneself" (Hall 1989, 23).

VII. CONCLUSION

Through this paper, we can conclude that names and identity are closely linked in *The Mistress of Spices*. Tilo's life has been shaped by the many names she has carried. Each name has been given with purpose and meaning. With every new name, a new self has been created. Her identity has been seen as fluid and changing. A struggle between her inner and outer worlds has been observed. Ambivalence has been felt in her choices and actions. Cognitive changes have been experienced at each stage. The burden of expectation has been carried through her various names. At the same time, strength has been gained from them. The spices have been presented as guides and limits. Transformation has been shown as both painful and healing. Identity is seen as a progression, not a limit. Tilo's loss of one identity gives rise to the other. In Tilo's journey, we have seen both duality and endurance. Her journey also reflects the global quest for belonging. The conflict of the diaspora has been mirrored in her struggle. Acceptance of change has brought healing. Hence, it is comprehended that identity cannot be limited to one name. At last, Tilo's life has been viewed as a journey of struggle, hope, and self-realization.

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Pedagogy of Nonconformity in Dead Poets Society: Institutional Discipline versus Individual Consciousness

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Abstract— Educational institutions often present themselves as neutral spaces of intellectual cultivation, yet critical theory has consistently shown that schooling frequently operates as a mechanism of regulation and ideological reproduction. *Dead Poets Society* (1989) explores this paradox through its portrayal of an elite boarding school where conformity is normalized as excellence. This paper examines pedagogy in the film as a site of tension between institutional discipline and individual consciousness. Drawing on Michel Foucault's theory of disciplinary power and Paulo Freire's concept of critical pedagogy, the study argues that nonconformity in the film is neither romantic rebellion nor individual failure, but a structurally constrained ethical position. Through close textual analysis, the paper demonstrates how authority at Welton Academy functions through internalized obedience, symbolic legitimacy, and emotional repression. While John Keating's pedagogical approach disrupts passive learning and awakens critical reflection, it remains limited by its individualistic orientation and lack of institutional support. The film ultimately reveals that the awakening of consciousness, when unsupported by structural transformation, may intensify vulnerability rather than enable freedom, raising enduring questions about pedagogical responsibility.



Keywords— Critical Consciousness, Education, Institutional Power, Nonconformity, Pedagogy

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is frequently imagined as a neutral process devoted to intellectual development and social mobility. However, critical theorists have long challenged this assumption, arguing that schooling often reproduces dominant ideologies and social hierarchies rather than interrogating them (Foucault, 1977; Freire, 1970; Dewey, 1938; Illich, 1971). Within this critical tradition, education is understood not merely as knowledge transmission but as a formative process shaping identity, aspiration, and obedience.

Dead Poets Society situates this debate within the elite setting of Welton Academy, an institution governed by rigid traditions and moral absolutism. Rather than presenting rebellion as an uncomplicated moral victory, the film foregrounds the psychological and ethical costs of resisting authority within an inflexible system. This paper argues that the central conflict of the film lies in the

imbalance between awakened individual consciousness and the durability of institutional discipline. Pedagogy, in this context, becomes a contested space where freedom is encouraged but structurally constrained.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly engagement with *Dead Poets Society* has largely revolved around its representation of education, authority, and the figure of the inspirational teacher. Early cultural analyses interpreted the film as a cinematic endorsement of progressive pedagogy, emphasizing its challenge to rote learning and authoritarian schooling (Giroux, 2002). Giroux situates the film within a broader political critique of education, arguing that it dramatizes the tension between democratic ideals and institutional conservatism, while simultaneously cautioning that such narratives often personalize systemic conflict by locating resistance in

exceptional individuals rather than collective structures (Giroux, 2002). Hooks similarly frames emancipatory education as an affective and dialogic practice, yet warns that liberation-centered pedagogy risks ethical incompleteness when emotional awakening is not accompanied by institutional accountability (Hooks, 1994)]. These insights are central to the present paper, which extends this critique by examining how *Dead Poets Society* exposes the structural vulnerability produced when individual consciousness is awakened within rigid disciplinary systems.

Theoretical perspectives on institutional power further illuminate the film's pedagogical conflict. Foucault's analysis of disciplinary institutions demonstrates how schools regulate individuals through internalized norms rather than overt coercion, producing compliant subjects who self-police behavior and aspiration (Foucault, 1977). Althusser complements this view by conceptualizing education as an ideological state apparatus that reproduces dominant values through cultural legitimacy rather than force (Althusser, 1971). Bourdieu deepens this analysis by showing how institutions delimit the horizon of possible identities, rendering deviation psychologically and socially costly (Bourdieu, 1990). When applied to *Dead Poets Society*, these frameworks reveal Welton Academy not merely as a conservative school but as a self-reproducing system that forecloses meaningful dissent.

Critical pedagogy offers a contrasting but incomplete alternative. Freire's rejection of the "banking model" of education emphasizes dialogue, praxis, and consciousness-raising as foundations of humanization (Freire, 1970). Dewey similarly advocates experiential learning rooted in reflection and lived experience (Dewey, 1938). However, contemporary scholars caution that pedagogical freedom detached from structural reform may inadvertently intensify precarity rather than empowerment (Biesta, 2017; Todd, 2015). This tension is central to the present study, which argues that Keating's pedagogy, while ethically motivated remains constrained by its individualistic and aesthetic orientation. By synthesizing classic and contemporary scholarship, this paper positions *Dead Poets Society* as a critical text that reveals both the necessity and the limits of pedagogical nonconformity within institutional power.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: EDUCATION, POWER AND SUBJECT FORMATION

This study approaches education as a formative social practice rather than a neutral intellectual exercise. Michel Foucault's analysis of disciplinary power provides a foundational framework for understanding how institutions

shape compliant subjects through normalization and internalized regulation rather than direct coercion (Foucault, 1977). Within such systems, authority becomes effective precisely because it is experienced as personal duty rather than external force.

Louis Althusser's concept of education as an ideological state apparatus further clarifies this process. Schools do not merely transmit skills or knowledge; they reproduce dominant values by embedding ideology within routine practices such as discipline, assessment, and tradition (Althusser, 1971). Bourdieu extends this insight by demonstrating how institutions define the limits of aspiration, shaping what individuals perceive as possible or permissible (Bourdieu, 1990). Together, these perspectives allow Welton Academy to be read as a system that governs desire as much as behavior.

Against this disciplinary model stands the tradition of critical pedagogy. Paulo Freire emphasizes dialogue and reflection as essential to humanization, rejecting educational practices that reduce learners to passive recipients of authority (Freire, 1970). John Dewey similarly argues that education must be rooted in lived experience and reflective engagement rather than rote transmission (Dewey, 1938). However, recent pedagogical theorists caution that the awakening of consciousness without structural support may intensify vulnerability rather than enable freedom (Biesta, 2017; Todd, 2015). This unresolved tension frames the analysis that follows.

IV. INSTITUTIONAL DISCIPLINE AT WELTON ACADEMY

Welton Academy exemplifies the subtle efficiency of disciplinary power. Its celebrated values of tradition, honor, discipline, and excellence function not only as moral ideals but as mechanisms of ideological control. Drawing on Althusser's framework, the school can be understood as an institution that secures obedience by presenting conformity as virtue (Althusser, 1971).

Foucault's claim that discipline operates most effectively through internalization is evident in the students' conduct (Foucault, 1977). Surveillance is rarely explicit, yet it is omnipresent through academic evaluation, parental expectation, and peer regulation. Fear of failure and disappointment becomes the primary mode of control, rendering overt punishment largely unnecessary.

Neil Perry's conflict illustrates how such institutions restrict the horizon of possibility. His desire to pursue acting does not reject excellence but challenges its narrow definition. As Bourdieu suggests, institutions shape not only outcomes but the very conditions under which

alternatives can be imagined (Bourdieu, 1990). Neil's tragedy thus emerges from an environment that denies negotiation and plurality rather than from individual defiance alone.

V. KEATING'S PEDAGOGY AND THE LIMITS OF AWAKENING

John Keating's pedagogy disrupts Welton's authoritarian logic by emphasizing poetry, imagination, and reflective thought. His teaching aligns with Dewey's view of education as an experiential process and Freire's insistence on dialogue as a means of critical engagement (Dewey, 1938; Freire, 1970). By encouraging students to question authority, Keating unsettles internalized obedience and invites intellectual self-awareness.

However, Keating's approach remains largely individualistic and aesthetic. While it awakens critical reflection, it does not address the institutional structures that constrain student agency. Jacques Rancière's critique of pedagogical emancipation is relevant here. He warns that intellectual awakening without structural equality risks reinforcing dependency rather than producing genuine freedom (Rancière, 1991).

Keating's ethical limitation lies in his failure to prepare students for institutional resistance. By encouraging nonconformity without providing strategies for negotiation or collective support, he inadvertently exposes students to retaliation. His pedagogy challenges authority symbolically but leaves its material foundations intact.

VI. MASCULINITY, SILENCE, AND EMOTIONAL REGULATION

The film also reveals how elite educational institutions enforce restrictive models of masculinity. Scholars have shown that such environments privilege emotional restraint, competitiveness, and achievement-oriented identity (Connell, 2005; Kimmel, 2012). Within this framework, vulnerability is interpreted as weakness rather than as a legitimate human response.

Neil's inability to articulate distress reflects this emotional regulation. Erikson's work on adolescent identity formation underscores how the denial of autonomy during this developmental stage intensifies psychological conflict (Erikson, 1968). In a setting where emotional expression is discouraged, nonconformity becomes isolating rather than empowering.

Silence functions as a form of compliance, and emotional repression becomes a condition of belonging. The film thus suggests that institutional discipline operates not only

through rules and evaluation but through affective control. This dimension complicates romantic interpretations of rebellion by foregrounding its psychological cost.

VII. CONSCIOUSNESS WITHOUT STRUCTURE

The central paradox of the film lies in the awakening of individual consciousness within an unchanged institutional framework. Keating's pedagogy disrupts internalized obedience, yet Welton's disciplinary structure remains intact. As Foucault argues, institutions preserve stability by isolating dissent and attributing disruption to individual actors rather than systemic conditions (Foucault, 1977).

Keating's dismissal exemplifies this process. Responsibility is displaced onto the teacher, allowing the institution to reaffirm its authority without self-examination. The students' final act of standing on their desks is morally resonant, yet it remains symbolically contained. It affirms ethical conviction without producing structural change.

Contemporary educational theorists caution that inspiration detached from institutional responsibility risks ethical fragility (Biesta, 2017; Todd, 2015; Ball, 2016; Giroux, 2019). Hannah Arendt's reflections on authority further illuminate this tension, suggesting that institutions fail not through rebellion alone but through their refusal to acknowledge responsibility for plurality and dissent (Arendt, 1968). The film ultimately resists closure, offering instead a sober reflection on the limits of pedagogical idealism.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that *Dead Poets Society* offers more than a familiar narrative of inspirational teaching. Read closely, the film exposes the fragile position of individual consciousness when it is awakened within institutions that remain structurally unchanged. Nonconformity, in this context, appears neither heroic nor futile, but deeply contingent, shaped by systems that quietly regulate aspiration, emotion, and silence.

One of the strengths of this study lies in its attempt to read pedagogy as an ethical practice rather than a set of methods. By bringing together theories of disciplinary power and critical education, the paper moves away from character-based moral judgments and toward a consideration of institutional responsibility. This approach helps clarify why Keating's pedagogy, despite its sincerity, remains incomplete, and why the consequences of awakening cannot be separated from the structures in which it occurs.

The analysis also has its limits. Focusing on a single film necessarily restricts the scope of its claims, and the interpretive nature of the study leaves certain questions open. The voices of students themselves, for instance, remain mediated through narrative and representation rather than lived experience. These gaps point toward possible extensions, including comparative work across literary and cinematic texts, or dialogue with empirical studies of contemporary educational environments.

Even with these limitations, the paper has practical and conceptual relevance. It invites educators to reflect on the risks involved in encouraging critical thinking without institutional support, and it suggests that inspiration alone cannot substitute for structural care. For literary and cultural studies, the film stands as a reminder that narratives of education often reveal as much about power and responsibility as they do about learning. If *Dead Poets Society* endures, it is not because it offers solutions, but because it leaves us with questions that remain difficult, and necessary, to face

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Food, Abstinence, and Resistance in Mahasweta Devi's "Mahadu: Ekti Roopkatha"

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Abstract— *Food Studies help the present academia to explore how food functions a great deal in literature and how food opens a new gateway to interpret a literary text. In a literary text, food's function can be multidimensional. In Mahasweta Devi's writing, food plays an important role as it is addressed very frequently. In most of her writing, Devi places her characters at the margins, who are most of the time deprived of food. In her writing, the marginal characters are in an extreme crisis of food. This crisis is not natural. The elite/superior class creates this food crisis to sustain the marginal class's dependence on the elite. The class position of Mahasweta Devi's characters can be located through the foods they are given access to or denied. The present paper seeks to analyze Mahasweta Devi's "Mahadu: Ekti Roopkatha" (2004) from the perspective of Food Criticism.*



Keywords— Mahasweta Devi, food, class, abstinence, resistance.

It will be good to write about food in literature, with what Terry Eagleton says about food. He says, "If there is one sure thing about food, it is that it is never just food ... Like the post-structuralist text, food is endlessly interpretable, as gift, threat, poison, recompense, barter, seduction, solidarity, suffocation." (Eagleton) Another critic, Roland Barthes writes about the semiotics of food. To him, food is "a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behavior." (Barthes 29) Contemporary Food Studies have approached food from various perspectives—from anthropological to psychological. The anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss discusses food's importance in any culture. According to him, food in human life is no longer a biological thing; it is, rather, cultural as humans cook, and transform food from one condition to another—from the raw to the cooked. And, thus, food reflects the deeper mental structure of human beings (Levi-Strauss 586-95). Food is not something that is eaten for living on the earth. Food is something more as it connects the eater's identity with the food the eater eats. A rich scholarship includes food and identity in its academic sphere. As the sociologist Claude

Fischler notes, "Food not only nourishes but also signifies." (Fischler 276)

Food is an integral part of social structure as well. One's identity is determined by the food he/she eats and the food he/she does not eat. Regarding food and identity, French gastronomic critic Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin says, "Tell me what you eat, and I'll tell you what you are." (Brillat-Savarin 1) Again, regarding food and psychology, we can be reminded of what Kima Cargill discusses in her essay, "Historical Background of Food Scholarship in Psychology and Major Rhetorical Approaches in Use" (2013). As Cargill discusses, Elizabeth Capaldi's edited volume, *Why We Eat What We Eat: The Psychology of Eating* (1996), gives an outline of how human beings "learn about eating, from conditioning experiences as well as from family and culture, rather than the purely physiological mechanisms involved in hunger, digestion, and eating" (Cargill 40).

The complex relationship between food and humans can be addressed from two different perspectives. The first one is the biological to cultural relationship, and the second one is the individual to the collective relationship. The second type of relationship can be understood as

psychological to social. From the very beginning of life, the human mind reacts to what it eats. The mind begins to memorize the taste of the food it likes. The providers of these foods are part of the society to which the individual eater belongs. The society, through its choice of food, inculcates its norms into the individual's mind. Food, thus, constructs the individuals for its society and the individual can easily adapt to the societal norms as his/her mind is fueled by the food the society provides.

In Mahasweta Devi's writing, food is repeatedly referred to. It easily draws the attention of her readers. In her writing, food's function is multidimensional. Food symbolizes power and class position. In most cases, Mahasweta Devi's characters do not get enough to eat. Many of her characters die early as they suffer from hunger from the very beginning of their birth. With food, the issues like social, economic and political factors are strongly connected. Food marks one's social, economic, and political position. In most cases, socially, economically, and politically benefited people politicize with food. In many cases, the subaltern group suffers from hunger not only because of the food crisis, but also because the elite group uses its socio-economic power to capture the whole authority over food. The food-occupying class denies the poor access to food. Hence, Mahasweta Devi's characters can be categorized by what they eat and what they cannot eat. The powerful class/group weaponizes food to control the powerless. Full control over food confirms the powerful's sustenance of its position.

As Pierre Bourdieu shows, 'taste' is very much a social construction. The core idea Bourdieu develops is that taste is a social marker. In Mahasweta Devi's writing, taste of reori (a kind of grain) is connected to the identity of the Korku tribe. The Korku tribes are accustomed to the taste of reori. They are so strongly habituated to the taste of reori that they do not eat other cereals like wheat, bajra, makai or jowar.

In Mahasweta Devi's "Mahadu: Ekti Roopkatha" (2004), the protagonist Mahadu represents the Korku tribe. Once they lived in the forest. They live happily with other creatures like snakes. They learn from their ancestors that snakes are their cohabitant. Their way of living was disrupted by the elite, who consider natural elements as a commodity. When the elite started cutting the Sagwan trees, the Korku tribe lost their basic food 'reori ghash' (a kind of grass seed). Thus, the elite not only sold the Sagwan trees, but they also forced the Korkus to lose their food.

As Devi informs in her short story, "Mahadu: Ekti Roopkatha" (2004), the Korkus do not live more than

twenty years. The government took initiatives to provide food to the Korkus, but they denied such food help. The Korkus abstain from the rice, wheat, and jowar supplied by the government. For a long time, they have been denying this sort of government food supplies. Hence, the Korkus suffer from malnutrition and die very early. As the Korkus are not habituated to the common cereals like wheat, jowar, makai, and bajra, provided by the govt., they cannot digest these foods. They suffer from high indigestion and fall ill whenever they are fed such foods. There may be a number of reasons behind the Korkus' getting unwell. Disgust for those foods, in general, is one such reason. This disgust is psychological, social, and cultural. The Korkus have adopted a psychology that is very much influenced by their culture. The taste of reori is determined by the tongue. The tongue sends a message to the brain, and the brain preserves the memory of the taste. Thus, the taste of reori is transformed from the biological to the psychological. On the other hand, the Korkus are biologically and culturally far away from the taste of cereals like wheat, bajra, makai, and jowar. Now, when they are introduced to these cereals, there arises a sense of disgust in the minds of the Korkus. This is a "psychological signature of disgust" (Rozine 233) that the Korkus develop in their mind. The disgust is so deep that they get unwell whenever they are fed with such cereals.

The elite's exploitation of food, here reori, has a deep impact on the Korkus. The Korkus cannot adopt other food items. The impact is long-term. One generation of the Korkus is deprived of reori. The Korku's gene has remembered the food they liked to eat. Snatching away that food, the elite actually wipe out the whole community. A hundred years after the elite's destruction of the Korku's basic food, there comes a new generation, the young people of which die very early. The whole Korku tribe will die out someday. Thus, the powerful class annihilates the existence of the Korku. Food, thus, is weaponized by one class to abolish the other, the weaker class.

Abstinence is another issue that plays an important role in "Mahadu: Ekti Roopkatha" (2004). The government's assistance of food to the Korkus becomes futile. The Korkus do not like the common cereals like jowar, makai, wheat, and bajra. They deny these food items. In the text, their denial is mentioned as Satyagraha. As the Korkus do not have access to reori, they lack proper nutrition and physical power; they deny eating the foods provided by the government. The political agenda—Satyagraha—that was popularized by Mahatma Gandhi became a political standpoint in the lives of the Korkus. Their denial of government-supplied foods humiliates the government that is controlled by the elite/powerful class. The Korkus' abstinence from food functions as a resistance against the

elite. Mahasweta Devi's texts always expose the marginalized people's resistance against the center in multiple ways. Whether the marginalized people's resistance is fruitful or makes any change may be put under question, but resistance is there.

The popular reading pattern is always challenged in Mahasweta Devi's text. The Korku's denial of government-supplied food irritates the so-called conscious elite. The elite in *Mahadu: Ekti Roopkatha* (2004), represented by Dr. Apte and the IAS Officer Breez Kapoor, feel disturbed when the Korkus do not accept the government food assistance. The politics of helping a particular class /community is questioned. The elite's moral feeling or kindness is also challenged through the food denial of the Korkus. In the short story, the Korkus' denial of food is symbolic. The Korkus die, but they do not bend down before the ethical, social and political assistance of the elite-led government. Thus, the Korkus' abstinence from food becomes political.

The forest of Sagwan was once the chief source of food for the Korku tribes. Under the large Sagwan trees, the grass *reori* bloomed well. This sort of grass needs shade. The direct heat of the sun burns the *reori* plants. When the elite rulers began to cut down the Sagwan trees, the plants began to die. By cutting down Sagwan trees, the elite endangered the ecological balance as well. Consequently, the whole scope for *reori* plantation is destroyed forever. The lives of the Korkus depended much on the Sagwan forest. With the destruction of the forest, the elite actually deprive the Korku of the right to live. The elite, to gather and hoard more and more, throws the natural resources into danger. Deforestation also implies that there is a threat to the forest-dwelling people. The powerful want to capture the lands and the forest. To them, lands and trees are their property. The Korkus—the inhabitants of the forest—were the burden to the elite. Hence, the elite created hunger and forced the Korkus to live on hunger.

Mahasweta Devi's narrative is an activist narrative that makes its readers conscious of the politics of hunger. As narrated in the story, "Mahadu: Ekti Roopkatha" (2004), the Korkus could gather their food *reori* from the forest. They did not remain hungry as nature was not in danger. After deforestation, they lost their food *reori*—the only cereal they ate. They did not like cultivating any cereals like wheat. They ate only those foods that were available in nature. The destruction of *reori* is not just the destruction of a food item; it also took away the rights of the Korku tribes to food and other natural resources. The invasion of the elite or the elite-led government is a big threat to the food culture of the Korkus and to the cultural identity of the Korku.

Forcing the Korkus to forget their food choice, what do the elite want to do? The elite want to include the Korkus as a part of a civil society, which is chiefly headed by the elite. The elite also want to impart their food culture into the lives of the Korkus. The government supplies those foods that are not of the Korku's choice. Forcing the Korkus to accept foods like wheat, bajra, makai, and jowar, the elite/the State wants to impose its terms and conditions on the Korkus. So, acceptance of wheat, etc., means acceptance of law and rules of the State. But the Korkus would not accept that, and hence, they deny accepting rationed foods. And, thus, they are forced to abstain from food.

As already discussed, the government once tried to feed the Korkus, but they failed. The government forgets them later. The young district collector says, "It is very hard to change the food habit of the primitive tribe...wheat, jowar, bajra, makai—what not have we issued to them? They did not accept those foods. They get unwell if they eat those foods" (Devi 293). The district collector's comment proves that the government has failed to change the food habits of the Korkus. The Korku's forced abstinence from food (wheat, jowar, bajra and makai) is a resistance against the government. They resist the politics of the State. They do not want to be a part of a society that they think is not their own. Their food abstinence is a challenge that creates a sense of failure in the minds of the State. The foods supplied by the government are rich sources of nutrition, but the Korkus do not accept these foods. Their identity is strongly connected with *reori*. It seems that if they accept wheat, etc., they would displace their own identity. Not melting their own identity, they erect and fix a politics—a mode of resistance which cannot be terminated by the State.

The popular cereals are not of their choice. Year after year, they were habituated to a specific kind of food. They liked to eat this grain. Their body or stomach could easily digest as the Korkus' gene kept the food in its memory. The body of a Korku cannot adjust to any other foods than *reori*. A Korku and *reori* are deeply connected. One identifies the other. The *reori*—or the identifier of a Korku—is spoilt and vanished from the lands where the Korkus lived, implying that before killing a particular community or tribe in a so-called modern society, the elite/the upper-caste-led government first displaces the food the indigenous people used to or liked to eat. Introducing cereals like wheat to the Korkus is not just an alternative arrangement of food, it is rather, an enforcement—a forced abstinence from the food *reori*.

The Korku tribe's abstinence from food has a rooted history. This history revolves around the nature and its exploiter—the developmentalist colonial rulers. The

cutting of Sagwan trees for developing the railway line is the reason why the Korku tribe began to reject food. Their abstinence from food is both literal and metaphorical. The Korkus understood that the powerful would benefit from the railway line. And for the benefit of the powerful, they, the Korkus, are to sacrifice their food. It is this historical moment when the Korkus spotted the nature exploiter and decided to protest the intruder. The food reori mediated between the human, here the Korku tribe, and nature. It is food that strengthens the bond between humans and nature. And it is the bond that encouraged humans to prevent any exploitation of nature.

The reori is a grain that grows automatically in the forest areas. No one harvests them. It means that the Korkus eat what they get from nature. They do not violate the rules of Nature. They learned this nature-human relationship from their ancestors. Now, if they accept these foods supplied by the government, they break the rule they have learned from their ancestors. So, the Korkus' denial of the government food supply can be treated as their commitment to the rules dictated by both nature and their ancestors. Through food choice, the Korkus establish their own identical choice and remain dutiful to their own system that can never be melted with the so-called common system/politics.

The elite/ state are unable to understand the cause of the Korkus' rejection of food. Generation after generation, the Korkus have been rejecting foods provided by the State. They did not even send the pregnant women and children of their community to government nutrition centers. This was a conscious refusal of nutrition. The Korkus do not rely on the elite's initiatives regarding food. Moreover, they are so strict about their food choice that they do not allow others to supply food. This food strictness reflects their commitment to their own culture, the age-old food culture. Due to a lack of proper nutrition, the Korkus' mortality rate grows higher every day. In one way, they are forced to abstain from food; on the other, they choose abstinence as a mark of their protest—a silent protest. Their abstinence from certain foods seems to be effective as the elite/ civil society feels disturbed at the Korkus' food rejection. Being denied, the elite feel humiliated and suffer from a sense of failure. Driven by this feeling of failure, the elite aggressively try to feed the Korkus.

As narrated in the story, the two aspiring nutritionists, Subhadra and Chintamoni, take Mahadu to their research centre for investigation. They give him all kinds of modern nutritional and medical support. They do so to achieve fame as nutritionists. To them, Mahadu is just a subject of their research. They are the parts of the state apparatus that establish a particular discourse about the Korku tribe. Subhadra and Chintamoni want to displace one

discourse—that the Korku tribe has turned away from life—and establish the other discourse—that the body of the Korku tribe still can respond to the nutrition-based foods. As researchers, they want to establish their names. This mindset is again a part of the colonial mindset. Mahasweta Devi, addressing this multilayered colonial angst, raises a question on the responsibility of the state. Towards the end of the story, "Mahadu: Ekti Roopkatha" (2004), a miracle happens. The body of Mahadu gets larger in the laboratory. The body becomes so large that the glass house, where he was kept, breaks into pieces, and Mahadu begins to eat everything—large buildings, trains, train lines, etc. This part of the story is symbolic. The whole Korku tribe is amalgamated into one body—the body of Mahadu. Mahadu, the gigantic figure, becomes so ferocious that he devours anything capitalist, anything connected with so-called development. The story ends with the typical Mahaswetan style, giving a jerk to the middle-class mindset and mentioning a big revolt of the powerless against the powerful hegemonic group.

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Myth, Allegory, and Modern Fable in *Life of Pi*

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Abstract— This article offers a sustained critical reading of Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* through the intersecting narrative modes of myth, allegory, and the modern fable. It argues that the novel's global resonance derives from its reactivation of premodern symbolic forms within a contemporary literary context shaped by postmodern skepticism, epistemological plurality, and trauma. This essay demonstrates how Martel mobilises myth, allegory and fable as ethically and aesthetically productive strategies for negotiating belief, suffering, and narrative truth in a secular age. Situating *Life of Pi* within traditions of mythic storytelling, allegorical survival narratives, and animal fable, the article contends that the novel redefines the fable as an open-ended ethical form that transfers interpretive responsibility to the reader. Through extended close textual analysis and critical dialogue with scholarship on postmodern narrative, trauma, and human–animal relations, the essay positions *Life of Pi* as a significant twenty-first-century intervention into debates about the function of storytelling itself.

Keywords— *Life of Pi*, myth, allegory, modern fable, narrative ethics, trauma, posthumanism.



Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* (2001) occupies a distinctive position in contemporary literature, balancing mass readership with sustained critical attention. It has been approached as a survival narrative, a postmodern experiment, a religious parable, a work of magical realism, and as a text relevant to animal studies and environmental humanities. What distinguishes *Life of Pi* is its deep structural investment in narrative modes that long predate the modern novel. Myth, allegory, and the fable in *Life of Pi* are the primary mechanisms through which experience is organised, trauma is narrated, and ethical judgment is displaced from authorial authority to readerly engagement.

The novel's framing assertion, that it is "a story that will make you believe in God," has often been misread as either a theological provocation or a marketing device. Yet the phrase functions more precisely as a statement about narrative belief rather than religious assent. *Life of Pi* does not seek to demonstrate the existence of God, nor does it ask the reader to accept any doctrinal position. Instead, it interrogates the conditions under which belief becomes possible and necessary. Martel's work aligns itself with mythic traditions that have historically addressed the problem of existence through symbolic narrative.

Myth in *Life of Pi* operates as a narrative logic that shapes perception and response. Pi Patel's childhood in Pondicherry is structured by his enthusiastic participation in three religious traditions: Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam. This plural religious formation is central to the novel's mythic imagination. Rather than presenting belief as doctrinal commitment, Martel presents it as an orientation toward the world characterised by wonder, attentiveness, and humility. Pi's religiosity is experiential and narrative in nature; it emerges through stories, rituals, and symbols that render existence meaningful rather than through systematic theology.

This emphasis on narrative formation is crucial. Pi's engagement with religion is inseparable from storytelling: Hindu myths of divine play, Christian narratives of sacrifice and redemption, and Islamic practices of prayer coexist without hierarchical resolution. The absence of doctrinal conflict is a deliberate refusal of exclusivist models of truth. Myth here functions as a shared human resource, capable of accommodating plurality without demanding coherence. In reclaiming myth as a living mode of engagement, *Life of Pi* challenges the assumption that myth belongs exclusively to premodern or irrational modes of thought.

The novel's central episode, the prolonged ordeal at sea, unfolds within a space that is unmistakably mythic. The Pacific Ocean functions as a liminal zone removed from ordinary social, historical, and ethical structures. In *Life of Pi*, the sea becomes both annihilating and generative: it erases the familiar world while enabling the emergence of a transformed self. Deprived of family, nationality, and social identity, Pi exists in a state of radical exposure.

Yet Martel's engagement with myth diverges sharply from heroic paradigms based on mastery or conquest. Pi survives not by dominating the natural world but by negotiating with it. Richard Parker, the Bengal tiger who shares the lifeboat, occupies a central position in this mythic economy. He is simultaneously a biological creature governed by instinct and a symbolic presence that condenses fear, violence, and vitality. As a mythic figure, Richard Parker recalls the beasts of ancient narrative, creatures that define the limits of the human and compel protagonists to confront their own capacity for brutality.

Crucially, Pi neither defeats nor transcends Richard Parker. Survival depends instead on recognition, distance, and ritualised coexistence. Pi's training of the tiger is less an assertion of dominance than an attempt to establish boundaries that allow both to live. This relationship unsettles anthropocentric assumptions underlying many survival narratives, particularly those rooted in colonial traditions where nature is framed as an adversary to be subdued. In *Life of Pi*, myth is reconfigured for a contemporary ecological consciousness in which human survival is inseparable from nonhuman agency. Critics such as Cary Wolfe, Huggan and Tiffin have emphasised the ethical implications of such reconfigurations, noting how Martel's novel resists the human exceptionalism that underpins much earlier adventure fiction.

If myth provides the novel with its symbolic architecture, allegory supplies its most contested interpretive dimension. The disclosure of an alternative version of Pi's story, one that replaces animals with human figures, forces a retrospective re-evaluation of the entire narrative. Rather than resolving ambiguity, this doubling intensifies it.

Traditionally, allegory has been associated with interpretive clarity, offering stable correspondences between narrative elements and abstract meanings (Fletcher). *Life of Pi* deliberately disrupts this tradition. While the parallels between animals and humans are strongly implied, they are never definitively fixed. The novel resists any final decoding that would render one story true and the other false. By refusing to privilege the ostensibly factual account, Martel foregrounds the psychological and moral costs of unmediated truth.

Read through the lens of trauma theory, the allegorical structure of *Life of Pi* emerges as a response to experiences that exceed the limits of direct representation. Scholars such as Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra have emphasised that trauma often manifests through indirection, repetition, and symbolic displacement rather than through linear narration. The animal story functions as such a displacement, enabling Pi to narrate an experience that would otherwise threaten psychic disintegration. Allegory here is a survival strategy, a means of preserving narrative coherence in the aftermath of extreme violence and loss.

This function of allegory becomes particularly evident in the episode of the carnivorous island. The island appears as a surreal, almost fantastic space that momentarily offers refuge, nourishment, and apparent safety. Yet its nocturnal transformation into a site of consumption and death destabilises any simple reading of sanctuary. Allegorically, the island can be interpreted as a figure for moral stasis, psychological denial, or the seductive danger of forgetting trauma. Within the logic of the novel, the island represents the temptation to abandon narrative responsibility altogether, to survive biologically at the cost of ethical and mnemonic integrity. Pi's decision to leave the island signals a refusal of such stasis and affirms the necessity of continued narrative engagement, even when it entails suffering.

The Japanese officials who investigate the shipwreck embody a rationalist epistemology grounded in documentation, causality, and empirical verification. Their skepticism toward Pi's account reflects a modern confidence in scientific explanation as the sole arbiter of truth. Pi's counter-question, "Which is the better story?" exposes the limitations of factual inquiry. The officials' eventual preference for the animal story suggests an implicit recognition that meaning cannot be reduced to evidence alone. Allegory thus becomes a site where competing epistemologies confront one another without resolution.

This unresolved confrontation extends to the novel's treatment of religion. Rather than offering theological arguments, *Life of Pi* allegorises belief as a narrative choice. Faith, in this framework, is not assent to unverifiable propositions but a commitment to stories that render suffering intelligible and life bearable. By situating belief within the logic of storytelling, Martel avoids both dogmatism and dismissal, presenting religion as one of several narrative strategies humans employ to confront the unknown.

Alongside myth and allegory, the fable constitutes the third major narrative mode shaping *Life of Pi*. Classical fables are typically brief, didactic narratives featuring animals that embody moral qualities. Martel retains the animal-centered

structure of the fable but radically revises its function. *Life of Pi* is expansive rather than concise, and ambiguous rather than morally prescriptive.

As a modern fable, the novel refuses to dictate a moral lesson. Instead, it constructs a narrative situation in which ethical meaning emerges through choice. The reader, like the Japanese officials, is invited to decide which story to accept. This invitation transforms interpretation into an ethical act, aligning the novel with contemporary theories of narrative ethics articulated by scholars such as Martha Nussbaum and Wayne Booth. The absence of a definitive moral is not a failure of form but its defining feature.

The relationship between Pi and Richard Parker exemplifies this ethical openness. The tiger cannot be reduced to a simple symbol of evil or redemption. His presence forces Pi to confront uncomfortable truths about survival, including the necessity of violence and the fragility of moral boundaries under extreme conditions. The fable thus resists sentimentalisation, insisting on the complexity of ethical life when stripped of social norms. This resistance differentiates Martel's work from earlier animal fables, which often rely on anthropomorphic simplification.

The novel's conclusion, in which Richard Parker disappears into the jungle without acknowledgment, underscores this refusal of consolation. There is no narrative closure that redeems suffering or compensates loss. Within the framework of the modern fable, this ending reinforces the novel's ethical seriousness. It denies the reader the comfort of moral symmetry, insisting instead on the persistence of absence and unresolved grief. Rebecca Duncan's reading of the novel as a postmodern survivor narrative is particularly illuminating here, as it emphasises survival not as closure but as ongoing negotiation with loss.

The fusion of myth, allegory, and fable in *Life of Pi* must be understood within its postmodern context. The novel is acutely aware of the instability of grand narratives and the constructed nature of storytelling. Yet unlike more ironic or nihilistic postmodern texts, it does not abandon the search for meaning. Instead, it reclaims older narrative forms precisely because of their symbolic flexibility. Myth and allegory, in Martel's hands, are not instruments of totalising explanation but resources for negotiating uncertainty.

This negotiation is particularly evident in the novel's treatment of pluralism. Pi's simultaneous commitment to multiple religious traditions challenges exclusivist models of identity and belief. Rather than resolving contradictions, the narrative accommodates them, suggesting that coherence is less important than vitality. This pluralism extends to the novel's generic hybridity, which resists stable classification. The text thus participates in broader debates

within comparative literature and world literature about hybridity, translation, and cultural exchange.

The transnational trajectory of the narrative, from India to the Pacific to North America, further reinforces its global orientation. Myth and fable here are not bound to a single cultural lineage; they function as shared human strategies for grappling with extremity. In this sense, *Life of Pi* participates in a reimagining of world literature that privileges narrative circulation over cultural purity. The novel's reception history, spanning diverse linguistic and cultural contexts, attests to the continued relevance of these narrative modes.

Ultimately, *Life of Pi* insists that stories matter not because they correspond perfectly to reality, but because they shape how reality is endured and remembered. Myth provides the symbolic grammar through which suffering is contextualised; allegory offers a means of articulating trauma without erasure; the modern fable invites ethical reflection without coercion. Together, these modes enable Martel to address the limits of rational explanation without relinquishing intellectual seriousness.

The novel's final challenge, to choose the better story, encapsulates its central claim. This choice is not about denying facts or indulging illusion, but about recognising that human beings require narratives that do more than record events. They require stories that allow life to continue in the face of loss. In affirming this necessity, *Life of Pi* reasserts the enduring relevance of myth, allegory, and the fable in a contemporary world that remains, despite its skepticism, deeply dependent on narrative meaning.

Pi's narration is not a neutral recounting of past events but a sustained effort to render an experience communicable without destroying the self that survived it. In this sense, the novel participates in a long tradition of testimonial writing while simultaneously revising it. Unlike many testimonial narratives, *Life of Pi* does not ground its authority in factual accuracy or documentary evidence. Instead, it foregrounds narrative coherence, symbolic resonance, and affective plausibility as the criteria by which stories are judged. This shift has significant implications for how the novel engages with questions of truth and responsibility.

The ethics of storytelling in *Life of Pi* can be further illuminated by considering the novel's self-conscious narrative frame. The presence of the authorial figure, who interviews Pi and presents himself as a mediator rather than an omniscient authority, destabilises conventional assumptions about narrative ownership. The story is repeatedly described as something that has been told, retold, edited, and shaped over time. This emphasis on mediation underscores the constructed nature of narrative while refusing to equate construction with falsification. Instead,

the novel suggests that all acts of storytelling involve selection, emphasis, and transformation, and that ethical storytelling depends less on exhaustive accuracy than on fidelity to lived experience.

This perspective aligns *Life of Pi* with broader debates in narrative theory concerning the relationship between truth and fiction. Scholars such as Paul Ricoeur have argued that narrative truth operates according to a logic distinct from empirical verification, one that organises experience into meaningful patterns rather than causal sequences. Martel's novel dramatises this distinction by juxtaposing two versions of the same events and refusing to adjudicate between them. The reader is thus compelled to confront the limits of positivist epistemologies and to acknowledge the legitimacy of narrative forms that do not aspire to factual exhaustiveness.

The novel's engagement with myth, allegory, and fable must also be understood in relation to its treatment of memory. Memory in *Life of Pi* is neither stable nor transparent; it is shaped by repetition, reinterpretation, and desire. Pi's recollection of his ordeal is filtered through time, cultural displacement, and the demands of narration. Mythic and allegorical structures provide a means of stabilising memory without freezing it. They allow Pi to return to the past without being overwhelmed by it, transforming memory from a source of paralysis into a resource for meaning-making.

The relationship between memory and myth is particularly evident in the way Pi frames his survival as a journey. The voyage narrative, deeply embedded in mythic traditions, offers a structure capable of accommodating both continuity and rupture. By casting his ordeal as a journey, Pi situates his suffering within a narrative arc that includes departure, trial, and arrival, even if that arrival remains ethically unresolved. This narrative arc does not redeem suffering, but it renders it intelligible as part of a lived story rather than as an isolated catastrophe.

Allegory further complicates the novel's engagement with memory by introducing distance between experience and representation. The substitution of animals for humans does not erase memory but reframes it, allowing Pi to approach traumatic material obliquely. This obliqueness is not evasive; it is protective. It acknowledges that certain experiences cannot be confronted directly without reactivating harm. In this respect, *Life of Pi* anticipates and complements contemporary discussions in trauma studies about the necessity of indirect representation and symbolic mediation.

The novel's use of animals as allegorical figures has also prompted debates about anthropomorphism and ethical representation. While animals in *Life of Pi* undoubtedly

carry symbolic weight, Martel resists reducing them to mere metaphors. Richard Parker, in particular, retains a stubborn materiality that resists complete allegorical absorption. He is hungry, dangerous, unpredictable, and indifferent to human meaning. This resistance complicates any reading that treats the animal story as a simple code to be deciphered. The allegory operates not by replacing animals with humans but by allowing both to coexist in tension.

This tension has important implications for the novel's engagement with posthumanist thought. By refusing to subordinate the animal entirely to symbolic function, *Life of Pi* challenges anthropocentric assumptions about narrative agency. The tiger is not simply a projection of Pi's psyche; he is an autonomous being whose survival intersects with Pi's in concrete, material ways. This intersection underscores the novel's ethical claim that human life is entangled with nonhuman life, not only metaphorically but practically.

The modern fable dimension of *Life of Pi* becomes especially salient when the novel is read in relation to earlier traditions of animal storytelling. Classical fables often rely on animals to convey moral lessons that ultimately reaffirm human social norms. Martel's novel subverts this tradition by presenting animals whose behavior cannot be easily moralised. The violence of the tiger, the predation of the island, and the indifference of the sea resist incorporation into a stable moral schema. The fable here does not teach a lesson so much as expose the inadequacy of simplistic moral frameworks in the face of extreme circumstances.

By refusing to offer a clear moral, *Life of Pi* compels readers to confront their own assumptions about survival, responsibility, and belief. The question of the "better story" thus becomes a question about the values that govern interpretation. Choosing the animal story is not an act of naivete but an acknowledgment that meaning often depends on narrative generosity rather than evidentiary rigour.

Richard Parker's disappearance without farewell denies both Pi and the reader the satisfaction of narrative reciprocity. There is no recognition, no gratitude, and no symbolic reconciliation. This absence underscores the limits of storytelling itself. Stories can render suffering meaningful, but they cannot undo loss or guarantee moral symmetry. In this respect, *Life of Pi* resists the consolatory impulses often associated with fable and myth, insisting instead on an ethics grounded in acceptance rather than resolution.

The expanded scope of *Life of Pi*'s narrative modes also invites reconsideration of its place within contemporary world literature. The novel's circulation across cultures, languages, and media forms suggests that its appeal lies not in cultural specificity alone but in its engagement with

narrative structures that transcend particular traditions. Myth, allegory, and fable function here as translatable forms, capable of resonating across diverse contexts without collapsing into universality. This balance between specificity and translatability is central to the novel's global reception.

At the same time, the novel does not erase cultural difference. Pi's Indian upbringing, his diasporic displacement, and his negotiation of Western epistemologies all inform the narrative's symbolic economy. Myth and fable are not presented as culturally neutral forms but as adaptable frameworks through which specific experiences are articulated. This adaptability allows *Life of Pi* to participate in conversations about postcolonial identity without reducing those conversations to allegorical simplification.

Unlike texts that seek to authenticate suffering through documentary detail, *Life of Pi* foregrounds the imaginative labour required to live with survival itself. Survival, in Martel's novel, is not the end of the story but the beginning of an ongoing negotiation with memory, belief, and loss. Myth, allegory, and the modern fable provide the narrative tools necessary for this negotiation.

The power of *Life of Pi* derives from the interaction of multiple narrative modes, each of which addresses a different dimension of human experience. Myth articulates the encounter with the unknown; allegory enables the narration of trauma; and the modern fable frames ethical choice without coercion. Together, these modes produce a narrative that is at once ancient and contemporary, skeptical and affirmative.

The sustained relevance of *Life of Pi* thus lies not in its capacity to resolve philosophical questions, but in its refusal to do so. By insisting on the necessity of storytelling in the absence of certainty, Martel offers a vision of literature as an ethical practice rather than a vehicle for doctrine. In a world increasingly governed by data, verification, and instrumental rationality, *Life of Pi* reminds readers that some truths can only be approached through narrative forms that embrace ambiguity, symbolism, and imaginative risk.

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Immigrants' Rooted Cosmopolitan Identity Construction in *White Teeth*

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Abstract— Focusing on Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, this paper examines how immigrants construct rooted cosmopolitan identity in globalized London. By combining Appiah's rooted cosmopolitanism with close reading, it explores the disillusion behind the first-generation immigrants' nostalgia for mythologized "roots" and the second-generation immigrants' mimetic assimilation to "pure Britishness", revealing how recognition-seeking trajectories fracture the subject's sense of temporal continuity. Through the second-generation immigrant Irie's embodied memory which echoes the sensory survival lineage of the Maroons, Smith rethreads roots and routes, suturing racial memory to the textures of London everyday life and resisting cultural-spiritual coloniality that exceeds territorial sovereignty. In the resistant narrative, *White Teeth* explores a third route to immigrants' identity—the construction of rooted cosmopolitan identity which passage from rootless assimilation to rooted identification, highlighting the cohabitation of ethnicity and cosmopolitanism at the scale of nested memberships, showing Smith's unique writing back to the Empire.

Keywords— *White Teeth*; Zadie Smith; Rooted Cosmopolitanism; Identity Construction



I. INTRODUCTION

In the context of globalization, the resurgence of British nationalism has posed increasing challenges to multicultural societies. Although cosmopolitanism is often proposed as a response to nationalist exclusion, universalist cosmopolitanism in Western discourse tends to privilege male, white, and middle-class subjectivities, constructing the cosmopolitan as "an intellectual...not limited by the local culture of his place of upbringing" (Veer, 2004). Its ideals and practices tend to overlook the complexity of structural inequalities related to race, gender, and class, making it difficult to effectively address the specific situations of marginalized groups which is actually what Zadie Smith explores in *White Teeth* (2000).

Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000), deals with the first and second generations of the multicultural British diaspora

with its exploration of two-generation immigrant families living in North-East London. Existing studies on *White Teeth* has predominantly focused on Samad's obsessive attachment to cultural "roots" alongside discussions of Magid and Irie's over-assimilation into Britishness, which likewise fails to provide a stable basis for identity. For instance, Kershaw (2021) highlights how colonial histories continue to shape diasporic identities through everyday racial dynamics. Yet few studies have identified rooted cosmopolitanism as a viable alternative that reconciles both extremes to offer a more dynamic mode of identity formation. This article argues that *White Teeth* advances a form of rooted cosmopolitanism that reconciles historical racial memory with contemporary hybridity. Rather than positioning "roots" and "routes" as oppositional, Smith presents identity as a fluid negotiation between ethnic inheritance and cosmopolitan openness, thereby offering a

literary reconfiguration of Appiah's concept of rooted cosmopolitanism. Through this framework, the novel envisions a mode of subject formation capable of resisting both cultural nostalgia and total assimilation, while maintaining continuity between past and present.

II. DISILLUSIONMENT OF THE FIRST-GENERATION IMMIGRANTS WITH MYTHOLOGIZED ROOTS

"Roots" serve as a significant symbol of belonging and identity construction for immigrants. However, in *White Teeth*, Samad's obsession with "roots" ultimately leads to disillusionment. Samad's "roots" are mythologized through two forms: religion and cultural memory, representing his fantasized pursuit of ethnic, cultural, and moral purity. As a Bengali immigrant, Samad Iqbal is marginalized in racial, social, historical, cultural, and economic dimensions, becoming a covert victim, despite this process functioning within politically correct rhetoric and discourse. Wendy Webster (2005) systematically discusses the changes in "Englishness" before and after WWII in *Englishness and Empire 1939-1965*. During and after WWII, Britain, as the empire on which the sun never sets, was depicted as a "people's empire", and the war was framed as "the people's war". During this period, due to wartime necessity, subjects of the empire—regardless of race, color, or class—were united, fighting together against the fascist invasion. As a soldier in WWII, Samad's "loyalty" is actually a result of his internalization to colonialization. Though disabled by a wartime injury, he "proudly aligns himself with the British Empire with a sense of patriotic duty while fully embracing his racial, religious and cultural identity" (Bağlama, 2019, p. 82), while viewing fighting for a foreign country as a "great honor". However, by the late 1950s, a new narrative of "Englishness" emerged. During this period, Britain faced both internal and external pressures, with anti-imperialist waves rising in the colonies and a growing number of immigrants. British people began to change their views on empire and immigration when their traditional lifestyles threatened. Immigrants across the face of the earth—hundreds of millions of them—are often ground zero of nationalist resurgence, and often symbolize the foreign Other that threatens the imagined community of the nation, built as it is on the logic of insider/outsider, us/them (Friedman, 2018, p. 199). The people of the colonies who once brought glory to the empire and served it gradually became perceived as threats to "pure Englishness". The "people's empire" collided with a completely different narrative developed in the period that invoked a quiet, private, and domesticated identity, and showed empire as a threat to Englishness (Webster, 2005, p. 8). The rise of a

purely "uncontaminated" nationalism left Samad facing exclusion and marginalization. Fukuyama points out that Rousseau's ideal of complete societal withdrawal is ill-suited to the context of globalization, as limitless individual choice exacerbates alienation, forcing individuals "to the search for a common identity that will rebind the individual to a social group and reestablish a clear moral horizon" (Webster, 2005, p. 58). Consequently, Samad's inability to achieve recognition and dignity due to his socially constructed identity as the Other shatters his romanticized fantasy of the empire, prompting him to establish a collective identity which is manifested in the fervent religious faith and the cultural memory of their ancestor, Pandit.

Samad's religious fanaticism operates as an inward compensatory response to a "runaway" reality which makes him oppose the school's Harvest Festival as "pagan" and demands Islamic holidays instead. The issue is less doctrinal than political: converting the public visibility of ritual into identity validation, reading "school recognition of Islamic festivals" as imperial acknowledgment. Religion thus becomes an instrument of identity politics that offsets his marginal position within the dominant order. The school supervisor, however, applies a different standard: retain the Harvest Festival because its charitable orientation warrants it: "it is precisely the charity aspect of the Harvest Festival that makes it worth retaining?" (Smith, 2000, p. 130). Bringing food to the elderly needs no biblical warrant, since it is "more about community" (Smith, 2000, p. 130). The supervisor's stance exemplifies Appiah's rooted cosmopolitanism: a universal concern for human welfare carried by a legitimate partiality to one's own community. The festival is kept as a civic practice that honors local ties while articulating obligations that cross confessional lines.

However, religious fanaticism fails to furnish Samad with a stable identity which grounded less in piety than in compensatory fixation. The conflict between religious sexual repression and the liberalized Western society in which he lived perpetually pulled Samad between assimilation into Western culture, its allure, and marginalization, resulting in a Du Boisian "double consciousness". In depicting Samad's religious devotion, Smith extensively employs a third-person perspective centered on Samad's viewpoint, conveying his identity as a devout Muslim through his actions, words, and inner thoughts. However, in the digression concerning Samad's prolonged struggle between sexuality and religion, the author's identity abruptly surfaces with the line 'Let's rewind a little' (Smith, 2000, p. 137), underscoring the 'unreliability' of the Samad-centred narrative. As a first-generation immigrant far from his homeland and a veteran

who fought for the metropole, he is inevitably influenced by metropolitan culture, rendering his contamination inevitable. The author's abrupt intervention shifts the reader's perspective from Samad's central viewpoint to an omniscient one, exposing the British trait Samad desperately conceals: self-comforting with British proverbs to justify his desecration of Islam. This double consciousness inevitably breeds a split identity, as the fragmentation of human consciousness, perpetually in conflict and incapable of coalescing into a unified awareness, compels those under its sway to act against their own sense of purpose, inflicting profound psychological anguish. He is torn between being a good Muslim and a man in Britain, between tradition and desire, between purity and corruption which yields his "hypocritical" religious practices. Under the pressure of double consciousness, Samad's body resists the moral imperatives of his mind: on the one hand he prays five times a day; on the other he conducts an extramarital affair with the music teacher Poppy which constitutes a counterattack against his disability and an attempt to demonstrate his power, charm, and agency. Although Poppy professes an interest in Indian culture and even stops her students from mocking Indian music, the gesture reads less as genuine cross-cultural understanding than as a strategic bid to attract Samad. Samad repeatedly insists that he is Bengali rather than "Indian", however, Poppy, as a white subject, disregards minority heterogeneity. After Samad ends the affair, Poppy appears at the restaurant where he works and, as a customer, accepts his service with brittle hauteur. Her "looking Samad up and down" (Smith, 2000, p. 208) invites a Fanonian reading of the white gaze—a form of visual power secured by positionality within a racialized order. Through the visual power of the white gaze, Poppy repositions Samad, a racial minority, at the bottom of the social hierarchy, exposing the absurd fantasy that ethnic minorities might achieve agency through sexual relations.

By absolutizing "roots" and seeking to reproduce them through a rhetoric of bloodline purity, contrary to Appiah's rooted cosmopolitanism, Samad directly triggers intergenerational conflict in the immigrant family and deepens his paralysis between an unenterable new "home" and an irrecoverable old one. Appiah maintains that roots are plural and to be celebrated, and that patriotism does not preclude cosmopolitanism. Samad, by contrast, conceives of roots as singular and absolute which will pass naturally to the next generation: "our children will be born of our actions. Our accidents will become their destinies" (Smith, 2000, p. 102). When his religion and ideology are fundamentally incompatible with Western values, this one-dimensional, linear hereditarianism of blood leads him to

impose those "untainted principles" on his children, seeking in them the authority he has lost. The children's wish to join the Harvest Festival "like everybody else would" (Smith, 2000, p. 151) is a bid for recognition, but Samad blocks it with patriarchal authoritarianism. Paradoxically, as an act of protest, children adopt a Qur'anic "silence" to resist their insistence on absolute roots. What in Samad's religion marks a "process of purification" (Smith, 2000, p. 159) is here redeployed to unsettle that very purity, exposing the fragility of purity discourse. Here, the narrative focus shifts from the father's self-account to the children's collective action, redistributing agency from Samad to the younger generation. In this secondary narrative position, the father's "absolute roots" are revealed as an authority that demands constant maintenance and is easily appropriated. The cultural "roots" cannot return in their purest form, and the next generation no longer identifies with his "homeland sentiment". This generational conflict has thus torn apart Samad's illusion of establishing identity through religion.

Beyond religious fanaticism, Samad also mythologizes the cultural memory of the forefather Mangal Pande—the soldier said to have sparked the 1857 Indian Rebellion—as a heroic figure resisting colonial oppression. However, by repeatedly invoking Pandey's history to establish an identity as an "imperial rebel", Samad perpetuates an identity rooted in the colonial binary structure. His cultural memory functions both as an instrument of resistance and a shackle of nostalgia. In Appiah's definition, cosmopolitanism is an expansive act of the moral imagination. It sees human beings as shaping their lives within nesting memberships: a family, a neighborhood, a plurality of overlapping identity groups, spiraling out to encompass all humanity (Appiah, 2019, p. 20). In contrast to this inclusive ethical orientation, Samad, caught in the tension between his homeland and the colonial power, prefigures himself as a "hero" while casting Britain as the "villains" he must oppose, deliberately maintaining distance. Smith employs the metaphor of the garden's ancient tree, which 'took up half the garden with its roots and not allowing anything else to grow' (Smith, 2000, p. 195), to reveal Samad's fanatical obsession with "roots" and its inherent exclusivity. The detail of 'cutting down the old oak in the corner' suggests the solution: only by shedding this fixation on singular, absolute roots can space be created for multicultural symbiosis.

III. THE SECOND-GENERATION IMMIGRANTS' IDENTITY ANXIETY OF PURELY INTERNALIZING BRITISHNESS IN EUROCENTRIC COSMOPOLITANISM

Smith categorizes immigrants determined to fight for “recognition” into two groups: those who either reject everything differing from their tradition, or conversely, admire everything belonging to the dominant culture while rejecting everything stemming from their own heritage. Second-generation immigrants Irie and Majid belong to the latter category. They experience failure and frustration due to the exclusionary logic of the other identity constructed for immigrants by the host nation. This identity anxiety manifests in Majid’s linguistic inferiority complex and Ali’s physical transformation as they attempt to fully internalize a pure Britishness to gain “recognition”. Homi Bhabha’s notion of mimicry names this colonial technology of control: the colonized are pressed to copy the ruler’s outward forms and to internalize their values, “almost the same, but not quite”, thereby advancing a purportedly civilizing assimilation. Because mimicry operates in the registers of affect and ideology rather than naked coercion, it “emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 85). In such colonial discourse, the colonized are often required to demonstrate loyalty and assimilation by imitating the colonizers’ language, customs, and values, through which ‘a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated’ and ‘the conceptions of “truth”, “order”, and “reality” become established’ (Bağlama, 2019, p. 83). Majid’s fervent pursuit of standard English exemplifies this linguistic mimicry and the identity anxiety of Bengali immigrants experiencing linguistic shame within the discourse of the colonial power, reflecting his determination to prove to white people at all costs that he was intellectually rich and possessed equal intellect. It becomes evident in the episode where Abdul-Mickey, whose speech is marked by a pronounced Cockney accent, expresses admiration for Magid’s refined deployment of upper-class English. Majid was essentially striving to overcome his ideological self-image as an outsider and escape the melancholic symptoms of rootlessness, discontent, deprivation, working-class identity, and double alienation that plagued him under the stifling material conditions of life in the colonial metropolis. Linguistic mimicry offers a consolatory fiction and a special identity through which the colonial subject imagines himself part of the metropolitan nation. The difficulty is that Britishness itself is hybrid and in flux, hence the more Magid pursues a “pure” British identity through Standard English, the more he is out of step with those around him and sharpens the

paradox. This complete assimilation of pure Britishness stands in stark contrast to the creolization occurring within the globalized context. Expanding from its original reference to a linguistic phenomenon and ethnographic racial mixing to describe sociocultural fusion, the concept of creolization itself embodies a philosophy of difference—an embrace of boundary-crossing and heterogeneity (Xiaohong Sheng, 2024, p. 68). Its rejection of standardization and reverence for fluidity bear the hallmarks of cosmopolitanism—‘Today the entire world is becoming archipelagic, creolized’ (Chancé, 2011, p. 265) which emphasizes the fluidity within identity. Language reflects the subject’s cognition and mode of thought. Magid’s relentless pursuit of standard English has forged an utterly rational perspective which led him to assimilate the logic of British colonizers, positioning humanity as the ruler and controller of nature: “We must learn more like the English. The English fight fate to the death” (Smith, 2000, p. 288), showing his entire discard of Islam’s reverence for nature. In the scene where Magid renames himself among friends, Smith juxtaposes the emphatic length of the Bengali original with the clipped Anglicized replacement, signaling the erasure of immigrant history and cultural memory and the potential fluidity of identity is thereby congealed into the single logic prescribed by colonial discourse.

For Irie, a Jamaican-British mixed-race woman subjected to the overlapping objectifications of patriarchy, coloniality, and class, her pursuit of a socially “recognized” British identity—unlike Magid’s fixation on reason and language—unfolds through coercive bodily modification under European aesthetic hegemony, a divergence that reveals not mere personal preference but the structural politics of recognition shaped by intersecting systems of domination. Colonial discourse installs “white femininity” as the normative benchmark, racializing and sexualizing mixed-race women in tandem. Following Foucault’s social-constructionist view of body and knowledge, the body is, in effect, a text produced through the constraints of multiple discourses, compelled to conform to prescriptive norms and symbolic systems; it functions as a palimpsest on which discursive traces, disciplinary techniques, and punitive mechanisms are inscribed. In *White Teeth*, Smith renders the body as a carrier of these operations of power and underscores their micro-physics, especially in the case of the immigrant woman Irie: she is both the object of male desire and the site where postcolonial identity is tested and negotiated. Irie’s body is figured as a Jamaican substantial frame “designed with another country in mind, another climate” (Smith, 2000, p. 266). This misalignment with British aesthetic norms thwarts self-recognition. Psychologically,

anxiety is the feeling of being “caught” and “overwhelmed” (May, 2009, p. 45), and that inner suffocation is externalized physically: tight undergarments leave her breathless. Irie therefore seeks recognition through the most immediate vehicle—the body—precisely the site where power and discourse interlace: “there was England, a gigantic mirror, and there was Irie, without reflection. A stranger in a stranger land” (Smith, 2000, p. 266). Within this mirror-gaze system, visibility is defined by the other’s eye, and the subject position wavers under which condition her “perception does not sharpen but becomes blurred or vague” (May, 2009, p. 45). The narrative then stages self-objectification: she imagined “tearing off loose, white-flecked flesh and packing it into those old curvaceous Coke bottles” (Smith, 2000, p. 243). Here, the body is partitioned, fitted, and commodified—no longer a vessel of sovereign will but “a body subjected to domination, remodeling, correction, and normalization ... a body drilled again and again” (Min’an Wang, 2022, p. 43). The mirror and the corset form a feedback loop of external gaze and internalized discipline: the former sets the terms of bodily legibility and the latter installs them as ongoing corporeal constraint.

After a series of failed attempts to “tame” her bodily shape, Irie turns to her hair. Hair grows out of the body with whose roots buried in the body’s “soil”, originating in the body yet differs from the living, responsive sensorium of the body as a whole. Wang describes hair as having a vegetal quality: external manipulation—reshaping, augmenting, trimming, or modifying—neither diminish bodily pleasure nor pressure the body’s unruly desires (Smith, 2000, p. 145), and hair possesses a plant-like capacity for continual regrowth. Precisely due to this controllable plant-like quality, hair becomes, within regimes of symbolic veneration, a clear index of the self and a site of virtually unlimited inscription on the body; as a bodily signifier, it thereby “enters the circuits of ideological reproduction” (Smith, 2000, p. 150). Modernity’s colorist heritage gave way to socio-racial strategies and technologies of the body such as skin bleaching or straightening frizzy hair, the function of which was to move as far as possible away from the so-called Black phenotype and the supposed socio-political position associated with it (Ferdinand, 2021, p. 210). Hair seems the easiest part of the body to reshaping, yet chemical straightening inflicts intense pain on Irie’s scalp: “she felt the initial cool sensation change to a terrific fire” (Smith, 2000, p. 277). The pain overlays the literal hair root with the metaphorical “roots” in identity, revealing the contradiction and disillusionment that follow from forcing oneself against one’s own origins. As a site for the production of exteriority, aesthetics, and symbolic

exchange, the ladies’ section of the salon is saturated with descriptions of pain, offering the most immediate image of how Black women’s aesthetics are disciplined in Britain. In the chemical relaxer, the hair becomes “dead, split, stiff, drained of all elasticity, like the hair of a dried-out corpse”, which signals not only the erasure of Black women’s agency but also the conversion of recognition into an economy of bodily pain. In this framework, “the passive body’s ultimate outlet is a covert aesthetic self-remodeling: the body unfolds not according to its own inner drive but according to aesthetic goals” (Min’an Wang, 2022, p. 43). Irie’s hair makeover exemplifies the “passive body”: her “self-invention” is not autonomous creation but a submissive compliance with white aesthetic discipline. Compulsory corporeal rewriting cannot secure recognition or a stable identity, because mimicry can never be a perfect replica. This perpetual “almost same, but not quite” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 86) exposes the hypocrisy of colonial discourse, which proclaims universality yet preserves exclusionary boundaries. Smith renders the contradiction at the level of psyche and sensation through mirror imagery and fine-grained descriptions of bodily movement. When Irie gazes into the mirror, what she confronts is not her “authentic self” but an alienated reflection—an image concealed beneath wigs and the borrowed hair of others. This distorted mirror image encapsulates how dominant aesthetics obscure and reshape the Black female subject during which mimicry fractures the colonial subject’s identity and “rearticulates presence through its ‘otherness’, that which it disavows” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 91).

Immigrants’ identity anxiety is also intensified by the Chalfens who turn ostensibly open cosmopolitanism into an instrument for maintaining white advantage and consigning immigrants’ attempts at integration to disillusionment. The Chalfens, like Samad, object to the school’s Harvest Festival, yet their stance and motives are entirely different. Unlike Samad, the Chalfens, dressed in “counterfeit Indian attire”, did not genuinely embrace Indian immigrants and culture. Instead, they seized the opportunity to showcase a cosmopolitanism centered on imperial discourse. Their objection looks like an intellectual critique of authority, but it is in fact a defense of the “purity” of Britishness against supposed pagan threat. In fact, the Chalfens are not purely “native British” but third-generation immigrants, and, as with Bengal’s hybrid history, there is no such thing as pure Bengalianness or pure Britishness. However, after achieving assimilation through language, reason, and academic capital, and gaining social recognition as intellectuals, their defending the “purity” of British identity became a crucial pathway for reproducing their social status. Thus, their opposition

to the Harvest Festival was not an open embrace of multiculturalism, but rather a gatekeeping practice that consolidated their own orthodoxy by delineating differences from the other. This cosmopolitan posture that masquerades as universal inclusion ultimately reinforces migrants' othered status behind a performative welcome. Joyce Chalfen, who prides herself on being enlightened and inclusive, ostentatiously greets the "brown-skinned stranger" when Irie and Millat visits and even speaks on young Oscar's behalf, saying that he "finds it exciting" (Smith, 2000, p. 299). Such speaking for others is a superficial Eurocentric cosmopolitanism: Joyce turns the "brown-skinned stranger" into consumable difference and into cultural capital for family cultivation. "Exciting" does not register recognition of an equal person, but treats the visitors as a novel spectacle and a token of diversity, a prop for sensory enjoyment and liberal display. Labeling all non-white individuals as "brown-skinned people" not only erases the ethnic heterogeneity Samad insists upon, but also subsumes Bangladeshi immigrant Millat and Jamaican-British Irie under the symbol of the Other. Joyce's "admiration" for the second-generation migrant Millat is premised on prising him apart from his group. In her stereotype, brown-skinned people" are "the ones who often sell her milk and bread: a functional, service-coded sign. Millat's "beauty" therefore registers not as recognition of a concrete subject but as an unusual exception within the category "brown-skinned", a condition that earns him the Chalfens' special regard. She replaces the recognition of living presence with stereotypical, typified symbols. Thus, social interaction—as a channel for cross-cultural communication—is deliberately reduced to a reenactment of objectified perceptions frozen under the white gaze. Consequently, the subjectivity of the object is entirely obscured and denied. At this point, the differences between Irie and Millat are abstracted from their specific individuals and contexts, becoming deployable resources for expression: they no longer point to living subjects but are used to reinforce the moral image and cultural superiority of the Charbonnier family. Oscar's blunt line—"I hate brown-skinned strangers"—punctures the rhetorical friendliness at once. The stark contrast between the mother's 'welcome' and the child's "loathing" exposed the British bloodline ideology concealed beneath the surface of this Eurocentric, ostensibly enlightened, inclusive, and friendly cosmopolitan family.

Rather than returning to "roots" to rethink identity, Irie becomes further drawn to the Chalfens' ideal of "pure Britishness", shifting her assimilative strategy from body transformation to mimicry on mind. Irie's encounters with the Chalfen family are narrated in third person through

Irie-centered perspective. Within these scenes, neutral dialogue and actions dominate the narrative space, leaving the remainder filled with Irie's internal analysis and imagination, while her sensory descriptions recedes, revealing a split between bodily feeling and consciousness. The split signals a romantic filter through which Irie projects "pure Britishness" onto the Chalfens, so that their supposed inclusiveness and cosmopolitanism largely reflect her own desire, rendering this Irie-centered narration partially unreliable. Authorial commentary intermittently interrupts to expose the projection, as when the text notes that "Irie had lost in her reveries accessing the Chalfens like a romantic anthropologist" (Smith, 2000, p. 322). As in James Joyce's "Araby", where the boy hero projects romantic fervor onto the bazaar and turns it into a stage for love and redemption, Irie similarly imagines the Chalfens as the emblem of ideal Britishness. Her desire lacks a clear object and is fueled by fantasy: "She had a nebulous fifteen-year-old's passion for them, overwhelming, yet with no real direction or object. She just wanted to, well, kind of, merge with them. She wanted their Englishness. Their Chalfishness. The purity of it" (Smith, 2000, p. 328). The narrator's italics on merge and purity stage a conceptual clash that deconstructs "pure Britishness": once there is merging, purity is forfeited; if purity is preserved, merging is made impossible. The immediate reminder of the Chalfens' genealogy—"third-generation immigrants by way of Germany and Poland"—punctures the fantasy of purity and reveals Irie's longing as a projection filtered through an idealizing lens. Irie's completely assimilation draws a sharp line between herself and her Jamaican identity and she equates freedom with cutting the tie with her history, thereby reproducing the colonial binary in which one must choose either the "tangled roots" of the past or the "reason" claimed by Britishness. The scene in which Irie files paperwork for Marcus symbolizes a deliberate "pruning" of ethnic memory and a retention of records certified as rational by Britishness, which sharpens the metaphor of abandonment and selection. The classification and sifting of documents operate as an allegory that fixes "roots" and Britishness into a binary and performs a kind of self-purification. Even so, the narrative sustains an uneasy tension. As she crosses borders, she feels she is "was crossing borders, sneaking into England; it felt like some terribly mutinous act" (Smith, 2000, p. 328), exposing the dislocation produced by mimicry, as an outward sense of rationality and order cannot dispel the inward experience of alienation. In "Araby", Joyce punctures the boy's romantic projection with the bazaar's emptiness and chill, foreshadowing disillusion and epiphany. Similarly, Irie's own disillusion is propelled by Marcus's sustained objectification of her

brown body, the seemingly mentor-like scientist. Colonial discourse imposes a double bind: it invites the colonized to refine themselves and move closer to the colonizer's civility, yet it resists that very approximation by invoking ontological difference and presumed inferiority, so recognition is perpetually deferred. Consequently, Irie comes to see that full assimilation through mimicry cannot secure recognition from the Chalfens or from Eurocentric cosmopolitanism. Unlike Samad and Magid, who remain trapped in a binary logic of single affiliation, Irie shows the capacity to construct a rooted cosmopolitan identity because, after disillusion, she keeps renegotiating and hybridizing, and in the wake of disillusion as "a great reinventor of herself" (Smith 368).

IV. IMMIGRANTS' NATIONAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION OF ROOTED COSMOPOLITANISM THROUGH EMBODIED MEMORY

Drawing on a diasporic Black sensory mode of narration, Irie she re-links the body to cultural memory and autobiographical memory as two embodied modalities of remembrance, reconstructing identity by restoring continuity between past and present. Appiah (1994) defines the rooted cosmopolitan as someone who is attached to a home of one's own, with its own cultural particularities, but taking pleasure in the presence of other, different places that are home to other, different people. With the individual at the core of liberalism, Appiah makes the concrete person the ultimate object of cosmopolitan ethical concern. Departing from Enlightenment celebrations of abstract reason, he turns to lived experience, adopting a humanist orientation that centers personal freedom and ethical responsibility. In diasporic history, colonial and Eurocentric discourses have long kept migrants' pasts outside "visible history", producing unequal access to the public sphere. Against this backdrop, if cosmopolitan ethics takes the concrete person as its ultimate concern, it must first make the person legible across nesting memberships. Legibility presupposes temporal continuity in a life narrative, hence the emphasis on the individual shifts to repairing ruptures of memory, restoring continuity between past and present. Embodiment builds in part on the work of postcolonial and feminist scholars, such as Frantz Fanon (1970), Luce Irigaray (1985), bell hooks (1990) and Judith Butler (1990), who "have drawn attention to the body as a site of knowledge and contestation and its role in the production of meaning" (Giese, 2024, p. 445). The "turn to the body" in social and cultural research is closely tied to critiques of Western scholarly traditions in which linguistic modes are granted superior epistemic authority. Such privileging

creates uneven opportunities to contribute to processes of meaning-making, particularly in the public domain, and insufficient recognition of the epistemic power of other modes of collective remembering (Giese, 2024, p. 445). In *White Teeth*, Irie's otherness is intensified by the self-styled enlightened Chalfens: their absolute deference to "science" and "truth" as linguistic paradigms functions as exclusionary intellectual gatekeeping, monopolizing discourse while occluding immigrant, sensory ways of producing meaning. Read through Appiah, cosmopolitanism is not merely an attitude of tolerance but a practice of the self: diasporic subjects use body and senses as media to mobilize and repair cultural/diasporic and autobiographical memory as embodied registers, thereby rebuilding temporal continuity across nested affiliations. Only in this way can diasporic subjects hold both "roots" and "the world" and effect present-oriented identity repair within multiple communities. Unlike the Chalfens' meticulously recorded genealogy with a clear timeline and ancestor portraits solemnly displayed, Clara Bowden's Jamaican family history appears fragmented after successive displacements, scattered across "wardrobes, forgotten drawers, and grimy frames" (Smith 399). Such unregistrable diasporic scatter is not the absence of memory but a shift in its media and carriers: when archives, monuments, and objects falter, the body, as an enduring presence across moments of rupture, becomes a crucial site for the construction and transmission of remembrance. The rupture, dispersal, and fragmentation of community further complicate preservation and transmission, hence "bodies mediate relations with close and distant others, and are therefore not simply generative of, or contain memory, but are active in its relational production" (Giese, 2024, p. 447). The body anchors the making, keeping, and passing on of memory, functioning both as a locus of agency and as embedded in social formations and cultural norms; it also changes with time, social shifts, and life's ruptural events, all of which shape mnemonic capacity. Fragmentation, then, is not an endpoint but a trigger for embodied remembrance: where the archive is missing, senses, postures, habits, and everyday rites take up the work of "rewriting" family history.

Through the shift from vision to smell, Smith foregrounds an Afro-Caribbean tradition of co-inherence with environment: where maroons once "escaped the plantation by the senses", Irie returns to racial memory by the senses, repairing the colonial fracture and rethreading the continuity between roots and routes. To heal the colonial fracture and to retrieve racial specificities, Ferdinand advances the notion of forming a body in the world, which calls for "a sensually immersive relation to the earth rather

than forms of mapping grounded in a dominant visual epistemology aligned with conquest and the Enlightenment's epistemic revolution" (Hosbey, Lloréns, & Roane, 2022, p. 3). By exposing the material and imaginary relations "through which our bodies are at once the trace-bearers and the tracers of a world beyond the modern double fracture" (Ferdinand, 2021, p. 205), he makes the body the starting point for engaging the world. In the Atlantic histories of marronage, flight is not merely a narrative of escape but an embodied cartography centered on the senses. Maroons "read the land into routes" by attending to topography, vegetation, the sound of water, smell, and wind, thereby producing counter-maps and survival knowledges against slave-catching. This sense of route, mediated by smell, touch, stride, and rhythm, does not rely on genealogical descent. It circulates performatively through techniques, habitus, and remembrance, and thus forms what we may call a sensory survival lineage. The Maroon is presented as a symbol of political resistance against colonial regimes through the presence of their image in Caribbean literature and through many monuments, and through the names of rivers and roads dedicated to them in the Americas (Ferdinand, 2021, p. 148). Irie mirrors this sensory method as a return to racial memory: in seeking her Jamaican forebears, she lets landscape and scent lead her:

And in the morning it wasn't Italianate vineyards out there any more, it was sugar, sugar, sugar, and next door was nothing but tobacco and she presumptuously fancied that the smell of plantain sent her back to somewhere, somewhere quite fictional, for she'd never been there. Somewhere Columbus called St Jago but the arawaks stubbornly re-named Xaymaca, the name lasting longer than they did. Well-wooded and Watered. (Smith, 2000, p. 400)

Here Smith's tricolon—"sugar, sugar, sugar"—with its clipped cadence, produces the pressure of monoculture; "next door was nothing but tobacco" juxtaposes another cash crop that profits empire while erasing local biodiversity, composing a landscape disciplined by the plantation economy. The passage is not neutral exotica but a return to colonial memory: heavy like a chain, "this all belonged to her, her birthright" (Smith 400). Smith italicizes belonged not merely to heighten tone but to convert "belonged to her" from neutral reportage into a positional counter-narrative claim. Building on the prior colonial tableau—"not Italianate vineyards but sugar ... and next door nothing but tobacco"—the italics reinscribe a production space that empire had recorded as someone else's property as her birthright, using typographic emphasis to perform a semantic counter-mapping that resists the dispossessive logic which expels migrants' pasts

from "visible history". Plantain is not indigenous to Jamaica, yet it has been indigenized as a vehicle of everyday foodways and cultural memory. It stands in sharp contrast to sugar and tobacco in the novel: sugar and tobacco index the plantation economy's macro-landscape and coerced labor, the visible and outward "field", whereas the smell of plantain rises from kitchens and street fryers as a proximate olfactory experience that carries family, community, and daily livelihood, the smellable and inward "home". The narration thus performs a sensory shift from the colonial grand tableau of vision to the intimacy of smell and bodily memory, loosening the visual epistemology on which conquest relies, while activating olfactory "involuntary memory" that affords a felt arrival at a place she has never visited. Crucially, as a migrant crop, plantain signifies routes rather than a single root, aligning with the rooted-cosmopolitan pairing of "roots/routes". In this way the text replaces the cash crops' "field-smell" with plantain's "kitchen-smell", translating external historical violence into a habitable everyday temporality and opening a pathway for Irie's return to racial memory. While sparked by sensory cues, Irie's imagined Jamaica is completed when material things connect memory to the body, so as to rewrite imperial "external proofs" into private testimony embedded in everyday objects. She marks, files, and tucks fragments—birth certificate, war reports, clippings—under the sofa, "as if their abundance would, while she slept, pass through the fibres and seep into her body" (400). This act relocates memory from the paper index to embodied practice, turning the home into a micro lieu de mémoire where the sofa's fibres figure a conduit between matter and body. The narrative thus shifts from reading pages to remembering with the skin, staging an olfactory-tactile, involuntary mode of recall. Once domesticated, those documents cease to be merely visual texts and become material mediators that carry Jamaican traces into present London life. Accordingly, the novel does not urge a departure from London to seek an essentialized "root", but within the global-city dwelling it uses material mediation and sensory practice to make paper archives and embodied memory mutually attest—thus turning from rootless assimilation to rooted identification.

Unlike Samad's nostalgia that clings to "roots" and the past as a route of flight from London, Irie stitches past and present, homeland and London, through sensory, autobiographical memory, thereby constructing a rooted cosmopolitan identity. Memory is a complex system that can produce an illusion of a momentary return to a lost past, while also articulating the complex relationship between the past, present, and future (Pachau, 2023, p. 28). It is also a process of reconstruction, as we constantly

draw from our past experiences to interpret and make sense of the present, and to plan for the future. By mobilizing autobiographical memory, Smith enables Irie to stitch past and present together through the senses, thereby forging her identity. Autobiographical memory, marked by auto-noetic awareness, is intensely individual, saturated with the rememberer's perspective. Smith's Irie-centered sensory narration stages her retrospective gaze after moving beyond "rootless mimicry":

With every fresh crunch came the memory of previous crunches. She was permeated by familiar smells: wet woodchip and gravel around the base of the tree, newly laid turd underneath the cover of soggy leaves. She was moved by these sensations. Despite opting for a life of dentistry, she had not yet lost all of the poetry in her soul, that is, she could still have the odd Proustian moment, note layers upon layers, though she often experienced them in periodontal terms (Smith, 2000, p.459).

In this episodic recollection, the crunch of leaves, the feel of damp sawdust and grit, and the smells they release jointly propel Irie's remembering. What matters is not the objects' objective memorability but Irie's ascription of new significance across the continuity of her own time. At this moment in Irie's Proustian reverie, episodic memory couples with oral pain: the "stabs like an exposed nerve" and "a severe malocclusion, the pressure of one tooth upon another" are not merely physiological sensations but an embodied manifestation of repressed affect, distorted intimacy, and misaligned identity precipitated by the activation of episodic recall. The image of the exposed nerve indicate that Irie's reminiscences of her many "firsts" with Millat carry a strong auto-noetic sense of time and affective load. Here, memory is ratified by pain rather than by language. Toothache, as an outlet of sensory memory, stitches together the moments she shared with Millat—first buying cigarettes, the first joint in the park, the first kiss in a storm. Experiences that ought to read as freedom and intimacy now return as acute discomfort. The pain does not originate in the events themselves but in the structural conflicts that the recollection activates in the present. Within Smith's layered constellation of dental imagery, Irie's "toothache" is an echo of the *White Teeth* motif. Teeth function as a central emblem across characters' developmental arcs: Clara's chipped tooth figures her break from the strictures of a religious household; the subsection "Samad's Root Canal" crystallizes his fixation on religion and ethnic memory; Alsana likens the assimilationist Chalfens to "a British bird with teeth" pecking at Irie, the Jamaican "seed" cast abroad. Irie's episode stages an identity conflict through the oral sensorium: teeth, as a normed organ, demand straightness, alignment, and proper occlusion,

emblematising social discipline over conduct, desire, language, and even modes of remembering. Malocclusion thus reveals the diasporic tension: on the one hand a drive for alignment with the *White Teeth* standard; on the other, a more complex cultural-ethnic-affective system that resists incorporation. It is precisely this somatic sting that catalyzes Irie's decisive turn: from passively suffering alienation to actively awakening the resistance potential latent in "misalignment". As Appiah argues, local attachment and openness to the world are not mutually exclusive: one can be deeply rooted and hospitable to elsewhere. In this sense, cosmopolitanism can be reconciled with place-based belonging. The claim rests on the species-level fact of migration—humans descend from ancestors in different parts of Asia and Africa and have dispersed across the globe: "We have always been a traveling species" with "the nomadic urge is deep within us" (Appiah, 2023, p. 215). After constructing rooted cosmopolitan identity, Irie is no longer needed to "extract the extra tooth" but learned to live with misalignment, which reorients identity toward a rooted hybridity capable of bearing pressure and asymmetry at the juncture of colonial history and personal experience.

Appiah's rooted cosmopolitanism keeps Rousseau's moral primacy of the person but relocates authenticity from inner withdrawal to relational making. Hence it naturally leads to mnemonic repair in diasporic life: only by stitching past to present within nested communities can one be both rooted and open to the world. From being the main actor of a more or less coherent life story the individual derives a sense of continuity in time which ... is part of any conception of the authenticity or fulfilment of an identity (Ferrara, 2002, p. 79). In *White Teeth*, Smith scales this framework to urban practice: Irie "didn't want to be involved in the long story of those lives, but she was, and she found herself dragged forward by the hair to their denouement, along the high road—Mali's Kebabs, Mr Cheung's, Raj's, Malkovich Bakeries" (Smith, 2000, p. 419). Multiculturalism foregrounds group identity, yet this emphasis on minority identities and cultures can, in a globalized Britain, splinter the social field into multiple mutually incompatible communities. By contrast, cosmopolitanism is articulated at the level of the person: the self is made within nested affiliations—family, neighborhood, and cross-ethnic interactions—with the city as both the medium and the site of identity formation. Transcending the limitations of multiculturalism, *White Teeth* is neither dedicated to "protect[ing] minority rights" (Walkowitz, 2006, p. 121) nor narrated "across several continents, regions, or national territories" (125) simply for displaying an ostensible mixture. Here, the bodily tug of being "dragged by the hair" sutures the self to a

semantic map of the neighborhood: each shop-name is a diasporic index (Middle Eastern, Chinese, South Asian, Eastern European), carrying smells, tastes, and social memory that pull “the long past she wished to avoid” into the unfolding present. The metaphor of hair also intertexts with earlier scenes of bodily discipline: hair once straightened by a white aesthetic now becomes the sensory conduit by which the neighborhood “pulls” the subject, exposing the external-to-internal mechanics of identity. It is made evident that both roots and routes define Irie Jones’s sense of subjectivity since she intermittently hovers between a commitment to her racial origins back in Jamaica and her attachment to Britishness as a second-generation immigrant to attain self-identification.

V. CONCLUSION

For the first-generation Bengali immigrant Samad, a pursuit of ethnic, cultural, and moral “purity” collides with the liberalized sociocultural present, producing his paralyzed feeling of not being able to enter the new “home” or go back to the old one. By contrast, the second-generation Magid and Irie, suspending ancestral memory, seek recognition through mimetic assimilation to “pure Britishness” under hegemonic discourse; both trajectories fracture the subject’s sense of temporal continuity. Smith focuses on the distinct experiences of individual migrants, thereby amplifying a polyphonic immigrant voice. Immigrant writing hence ceases to be a highly formulaic symbolic representation, instead becoming the fluid expression of vibrant individual lives, marking a move beyond narrow nationalism toward a cosmopolitan ethic of conviviality. Through sensory practice and embodied memory, Irie rethreads roots and routes, converting a passive narrative of otherness into active self-narration and furnishing a concrete, livable ground for a rooted cosmopolitan identity. Taken together, Smith roots the co-presence of ethnicity and cosmopolitanism in the ever-interwoven histories of empire and diaspora, offering a distinctive instance of writing back to empire.

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Research on Teaching Strategies for English Reading Based on Deep Learning

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Abstract— *Deep learning, as a pedagogical concept and approach, is aligned with educational reform trends. It has gained increasing prominence and offered new perspectives for designing junior high school English reading instruction. Classroom teaching of English reading based on deep learning emphasizes deep knowledge processing and advocates for learning that is socially interactive and inclusive. It draws theoretical foundations from Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives, constructivism, and metacognitive theory. In English reading classrooms, teachers can promote deep learning through strategies such as setting concrete, tiered, and achievable learning objectives; creating authentic contexts; and employing positive, guiding assessment approaches.*

Keywords— *deep learning, English reading, teaching strategies*



I. INTRODUCTION

Higher-order competencies such as critical thinking, reflection, and innovation have gained equal emphasis alongside knowledge acquisition and core competency development advocated by the new curriculum reform, becoming pivotal objectives for student growth (He, 2018). The *English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education* (2022 Edition) stipulate that English courses should cultivate students' core competencies, including linguistic proficiency, cultural awareness, thinking skills, and learning abilities. Developing students' thinking skills requires teachers to emphasize the internalization, transfer, generation, or creation of knowledge, which is also the cultivation of students' deep learning abilities (Bao, 2020). Deep learning aims to cultivate students' ability to solve real-world social problems. Achieving this goal relies on establishing students as the primary agents in their learning and guiding them to deeply integrate textbook

content with their personal experiences, thereby fostering new meaning construction and higher-order thinking (Wang et al., 2021). As the new curriculum reform continues to advance, junior high school English reading instruction has been profoundly influenced in both philosophy and methodology. Nevertheless, certain issues persist in teaching practice. Fragmented, superficial, and label-oriented approaches to English instruction represent particularly prominent issues (Wang, 2018). Integrating deep learning with English reading instruction not only responds to contemporary educational reform demands but also revitalizes teaching practices. Cultivating students' deep learning abilities fosters the development of higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills, ultimately guiding them toward forming rational and objective value positions.

II. THE CONNOTATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF DEEP LEARNING

The concept of deep learning was first proposed by foreign researchers, with its origins traceable to renowned psychologists such as Bloom and Gagné. In his book, *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing*, Bloom identified six levels of cognitive objectives: remembering, understanding, analyzing, applying, evaluating, and creating. This framework implicitly contained the academic concept of “deep learning” (An, 2014). In educational psychology, deep learning is often discussed in contrast to surface learning as a pair of relative concepts. These are not mutually exclusive but rather jointly reflect the depth to which learners process information during the learning process. Ference Marton and Roger Saljo (1976), among others, proposed that deep learning emphasizes connecting new and old knowledge and facilitates smooth knowledge transfer, whereas surface learning lacks such connections and focuses on rote memorization. This distinction emerged based on differences in how students process given materials or the cognitive level at which they acquire information.

He and Li (2005) were among the earliest scholars in China to define the concept of deep learning. They emphasized that its core lies in learners critically examining new knowledge and reconstructing their cognitive structures based on thorough comprehension, ultimately achieving effective knowledge transfer and problem-solving in complex real-world contexts. Building upon existing research, Duan (2012) developed an interactive hierarchical model integrating deep learning. He urged educators to focus on students' learning processes, fostering meaningful learning that builds upon their existing knowledge and abilities. Guo (2016) further deepened the connotation of deep learning, defining it as a learning process where students, guided by teachers, actively engage with challenging themes, construct meaningfully, and achieve significant development. This definition has gained widespread recognition in the field of curriculum and teaching reform in primary and secondary schools (Wang et al., 2021).

The connotation of deep learning reveals it as a profound learning experience built upon surface learning. This endows deep learning with richer characteristics.

Deep learning emphasizes deep processing of knowledge, which is its key feature. It is a form of critical learning, requiring learners to critically understand the content they study. This critical engagement constitutes another form of knowledge construction, enabling continuous enhancement of the learner's comprehension level. Self-reflection and evaluation are also indispensable in deep learning. Evaluation and reflection enhance cognitive outcomes during the learning process, enabling timely adjustments to learning strategies. Critique and reflection further facilitate knowledge transfer and application, empowering learners to solve problems in real-world contexts. The ability to effectively apply knowledge and skills in authentic settings serves as the definitive criterion for assessing whether deep learning has occurred. Instructional design must strive to create conditions conducive to deep learning, establishing this as the ultimate goal of classroom teaching.

The transferability of deep learning facilitates both knowledge transfer and cognitive transfer, enabling learners to apply acquired knowledge to real-world contexts and thereby enhancing problem-solving abilities.

Extensive scholarly research exists on the characteristics of deep learning. Through systematic comparisons between deep and surface learning, He and Li (2005) identified three core features: comprehension and critique, connection and construction, and transfer and application. Wang and Cheng (2025) examined deep learning from a social context perspective, highlighting its contextuality, higher-order nature, and reflective qualities. Furthermore, Guo (2016) proposed a set of key criteria for determining whether deep learning genuinely occurs, primarily observed through the following dimensions: association and structure, activity and experience, essence and variation, transfer and creation. Wang et al. (2021) argue that the concept of deep learning emphasizes the necessity for students to engage in practice-oriented activities centered around themes and new knowledge structures, thereby facilitating the transformation of knowledge into competence.

III. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives comprises six cognitive skill levels, ascending from lower

to higher order: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating. “Remembering” involves memorizing specific, fragmented information such as facts and definitions. “Understanding” requires learners to demonstrate comprehension by restating information in their own words. “Applying” signifies learners’ ability to utilize knowledge or skills in new contexts. “Analysis” requires distinguishing between facts and opinions. The “synthesis” level demands learners create new outcomes within specific contexts. Regarding “evaluation”, teachers assessing instructional design based on learner feedback aligns with this level of Bloom’s Taxonomy. Both “synthesis” and “evaluation” involve critical thinking, which is also linked to deep learning (Adams, 2015).

Constructivism also provides a theoretical foundation for deep learning. Constructivism emphasizes that knowledge acquisition relies not only on teacher instruction but also on students’ autonomous construction of knowledge systems and the appropriate application of methods, thereby achieving effective mastery and efficient learning (Li, 2023). Deep learning similarly advocates for learners to actively construct knowledge and promotes critical thinking.

During English reading, students can utilize metacognitive theory to monitor and evaluate their comprehension processes, consciously selecting appropriate strategies to regulate their learning progress.

Flavell (1979) first introduced the concept of metacognition, positing that metacognitive abilities directly influence learning efficiency and problem-solving capacity. He divided metacognition into two major components, metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive control. Metacognitive knowledge encompasses an individual’s awareness of their own cognitive characteristics, judgment of task difficulty levels, and understanding of various learning strategies. Metacognitive control involves the dynamic planning, monitoring, and adjustment during the learning process. This framework has driven transformations in educational practice, with subsequent scholars further expanding the scope of metacognition.

IV. DEEP LEARNING-BASED STRATEGIES FOR ENGLISH READING INSTRUCTION

English classrooms grounded in deep learning should first establish concrete, tiered, and achievable instructional objectives. These objectives define the core subject competencies students should attain upon completing a learning phase, primarily encompassing the ability to flexibly apply specialized knowledge, techniques, and strategies; accurately grasp methods reflecting the essence and principles of the discipline; and demonstrate comprehensive problem-solving abilities (Liu & Guo, 2018). The instructional objectives for reading passages should be formulated based on the specific level objectives outlined in the English curriculum standards. Teachers should also demonstrate differentiation and gradation in their approach to curriculum instruction, unit teaching, and lesson planning. Achievable and observable instructional objectives better guide students by articulating what learners can accomplish after completing the learning process. Lesson objectives constitute unit teaching objectives, and their formulation should balance specificity and relevance. When setting instructional objectives, teachers should also focus on cultivating students’ critical thinking skills, guiding them to actively question, analyze, and evaluate during reading, thereby enhancing their metacognitive monitoring and evaluation abilities.

Teachers should create an atmosphere and context in junior high English reading instruction. Establishing an immersive atmosphere and contextual setting in junior high English reading instruction is a key strategy for sparking students’ interest and building bridges for language comprehension. Teachers can immerse students rapidly into the textual context by creating an atmosphere. For instance, playing theme-related music, displaying images or short videos aligned with the text, or setting up simple props can stimulate multiple senses, reducing students’ sense of alienation from unfamiliar texts. Simultaneously, creating scenarios rooted in students’ lives based on the text’s content can make abstract words more concrete. Teachers can also design role-playing tasks where students embody characters from the text to engage in dialogue. They may pose real-life questions related to the text’s theme to spark discussion or organize collaborative group investigations where students deepen

their textual understanding through problem-solving. This approach alleviates students' apprehension toward English reading while encouraging them to actively draw upon existing knowledge reserves. Through experiential and interactive learning, it enhances both reading proficiency and language application skills.

In reading instruction, teachers should adopt positive, guiding evaluation methods to foster deep learning. Positive guidance evaluation goes beyond simple right-or-wrong judgments. Instead, it focuses on students' reading performance, capturing the bright spots in their thought processes. When faced with incomplete text interpretations, teachers can first acknowledge the validity of the student's starting point, then use probing questions to guide them toward uncovering deeper meanings. For creative viewpoints, provide timely, targeted praise to reinforce their motivation for active inquiry. This approach fosters a safe, relaxed atmosphere for expression, encouraging students to share their reading dilemmas and unique insights rather than passively awaiting standard answers. Simultaneously, positive guidance can be integrated with reading tasks. By highlighting areas for improvement in textual analysis, logical structuring, and linguistic refinement, teachers can steer students from superficial information gathering toward deep meaning construction. This facilitates a genuine progression from text comprehension to transcending discourse—achieving advanced learning.

V. CONCLUSION

With the advancement of information technology, transformations in learning approaches are increasingly drawing societal attention. Addressing issues prevalent in current basic education classrooms, such as formalism, superficiality, fragmentation, and rote training. Deep learning represents an inevitable choice and imperative for pedagogical reform in the information age (Zheng & Liu, 2018). English reading instruction grounded in deep learning, guided by the cultivation of core competencies, breaks free from the limitations of traditional reading pedagogy that prioritizes knowledge memorization over cognitive development. It guides students beyond isolated vocabulary and sentence pattern learning. Through deep discourse interpretation, connecting to life experiences,

and engaging in critical thinking, students' progress from comprehending texts to understanding connotations and ultimately to flexible application. This pedagogical approach not only enhances students' linguistic precision in reading but also hones their logical reasoning, innovative thinking, and cross-cultural communication skills, laying a solid foundation for lifelong learning and holistic development. Moving forward, as teaching practices continue to evolve, the principles of deep learning will integrate more profoundly with junior high English reading instruction. This integration will offer more actionable pathways to address teaching challenges and elevate instructional quality, transforming English reading into a vital vehicle for students to explore the world and develop their potential.

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Secure Attachment and Gender Stereotypes: Exploring Father-Daughter Relationship in Selected Animated Short Films

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Abstract— Parent-child attachment bonds and attachment styles significantly influence communication motives in father-daughter relationships, leading to numerous positive social and emotional outcomes in children. Warmth and involvement from fathers positively influence their daughters' social and cognitive development. "A secure attachment is not about the quantity of time spent together, but the quality of the emotional connection formed" (Mate 183). This paper seeks to explore a critical yet often overlooked aspect of caregiving role of fathers as primary nurturers in daughters' lives. While traditional narratives of caregiving tend to emphasize the role of mothers, this study argues for the recognition of fathers as equally capable and essential in promoting their children's development, specifically in fostering secure attachment and challenging long-held gender stereotypes.



Keywords— Attachment theory, father, daughter, gender stereotype, child development.

I. INTRODUCTION

"Attachment is the strong, affectionate tie we have with special people in our lives that leads us to experience pleasure and joy when we interact with them and to be comforted by their nearness in times of stress" (Berk 424). The bond a child forms with their primary caregiver, known as attachment, is crucial and endures throughout their lifetime, significantly influencing their development. This early attachment affects a child's social-emotional, cognitive, and language growth.

The most beneficial attachment is a secure attachment, where the caregiver provides full attention and makes the child feel safe. Bowlby noted that early experiences of healthy attachment enable children to form future relationships based on those experiences. Attachment theory is one of the leading relationship-focused frameworks for understanding child development. Created by John Bowlby and further developed by Mary Ainsworth, attachment theory emphasizes the crucial bond that keeps a primary caregiver close to their child and the

infant's need to seek the caregiver's attention when distressed. "Attachment is a relationship in the service of a baby's emotion regulation and exploration. It is the deep, abiding confidence a baby has in the availability and responsiveness of the caregiver." (Sroufe's 51)

John Bowlby introduced attachment theory in his seminal work *Attachment and Loss*, with the first volume titled *Attachment* in 1969. This pioneering research, later expanded by Mary Ainsworth, established the framework for understanding the importance of early emotional connections between caregivers and children. Bowlby, drawing from psychoanalytic theory, emphasized that early experiences profoundly influence behavior and development throughout life. John Bowlby explained that a child's attachment relationships with primary caregivers establish the foundation for a set of expectations about both the self and others. This framework is known as the 'working model of the self.'

In the late 1960s, Ainsworth devised a classification system for attachment that categorizes

individuals into three orientations, building on Bowlby's attachment theory. In the 1970s, psychologist Mary Ainsworth conducted pioneering research that led to the development of attachment theory. Using infants in her studies, Ainsworth explored how their relationships with caregivers influenced them. In the 'Strange Situation' experiment, she observed how infants responded when their caregivers left and returned, sometimes in the presence of a stranger.

Hair Love is a compelling short animated film released in 2019, depicting the story of Zuri, a young African-American girl who learns to embrace her natural hair with the help of her father, Stephen. Directed by Matthew A. Cherry, the collaborative efforts of co-directors Bruce W. Smith and Everett Downing Jr. added realism and cultural significance to the film. With its heartfelt story and stunning animation, Hair Love captivated audiences and won the 2020 Academy Award for Best Animated Short Film.

In 2018, animators Bobby Pontillas and Andrew Chesworth co-created the short-animated film One Small Step. The story revolves around Luna, a young Chinese American woman aspiring to become an astronaut. Luna draws strength and resilience from her father's enduring love and support, which fosters a strong and nurturing relationship. Academic success in children can be linked to their cognitive ability to focus, particularly among those with secure attachments.

Chenglin Xie, a Chinese animator known for merging modern storytelling techniques with traditional Chinese artistic styles, created the animated short film Father and Daughter. Released in 2016, Father and Daughter explore the enduring relationship between a father and his daughter, depicting her journey from childhood through adolescence, highlighting her professional achievements and her bond with her father. Chenglin Xie aimed to create a timeless and emotionally resonant story that explores universal themes of love, loss, and the enduring bond between parent and child.

Secure attachment is crucial for a child's development, influencing emotional stability, resilience, and the ability to form healthy relationships. The 2011 Google advertisement Dear Sophie effectively portrays this relationship by demonstrating how a father's engagement and affection can foster a secure and nurturing bond with his daughter. Using a Gmail 'diary', the commercial features Google Chrome's capabilities while digitally chronicling a young girl's life through her father's perspective. He captures and cherishes every moment, from her first steps to her school years. The father writes and sends emails filled with love, encouragement, and

pride. During challenging times, he provides comfort, and he celebrates Sophie's achievements. For instance, his supportive words boost Sophie's confidence as she learns to ride a bike. Such encouragement reassures the child of their caregiver's constant presence, crucial for building a strong and secure relationship. The active and emotional involvement of supportive parental figures, as exemplified by the father's digital communication, plays a crucial role in a child's upbringing.

Michaël Dudok de Wit, a Dutch animator, filmmaker, and illustrator based in London, received an Academy Award in 2000 for his animated short film Father and Daughter. The deeply emotional film portrays a father bidding farewell to his young daughter as he paddles across a vast lake. As she grows older, the girl's love for her father remains steadfast and continues to influence her life significantly. This narrative powerfully illustrates the lasting impact of a secure attachment formed in childhood.

Fathers play an invaluable role in their daughters' lives, whether through their loving presence in today's digital age or the enduring emotional connection that lasts a lifetime. A child's academic achievement, motivation, and self-esteem are significantly influenced by their sense of secure attachment. It plays a crucial role in a child's development, significantly influencing their emotional regulation, resilience, and overall well-being.

Attachment theory, co-developed by Ainsworth and Bowlby, proposes that early interactions between infants and their primary caregivers significantly shape the child's emotional and social development. Ainsworth's key contribution to this theory was the development of the 'Strange Situation' procedure, a method designed to observe and classify infants' attachment styles.

The Strange Situation involved structured separations and reunions between a child and their caregiver, during which Ainsworth and her team observed behaviors such as exploration, responses to separations and reunions, and the child's reliance on the caregiver as a secure base. From these observations, Ainsworth identified three main attachment patterns: secure, insecure-avoidant, and insecure-ambivalent/ resistant, later supplemented by disorganized attachment.

The primary attachment figure is typically the biological mother, though anyone consistently demonstrating nurturing behaviors over time can fulfill this role. Ainsworth states that, "The caregiver's sensitivity to the child's signals and her ability to respond appropriately to them are crucial for the development of a secure attachment." (24). The attachment figure should provide stability and comfort consistently to help the child develop a deep bond and rely on them for security and

comfort based on their responsiveness to the child's needs.

Fathers are often seen as figures of leadership, morality, security, and authority. The ongoing pursuit of equality in parenting brings notable advantages, including stronger family bonds, better work-life balance, positive role modeling, and a more just future for upcoming generations. This collaborative effort between both parents is crucial for shaping a brighter future for their children and society. By embracing nurturing roles, fathers play a pivotal part in this transformation, challenging stereotypes and promoting a more inclusive approach to parenting.

Hair Love significantly challenges traditional gender roles by showcasing an African American father who takes on the task of styling his daughter's hair, a role typically associated with mothers. This depiction breaks stereotypes, proving that fathers can provide the same level of nurturing and emotional support as mothers, thus redefining societal expectations of fatherhood.

One Small Step tells the story of a single father supporting his daughter's ambition to become an astronaut, a career often seen as unconventional for women. By encouraging her dreams, the father empowers his daughter, demonstrating that fathers can be instrumental in fostering their children's ambitions and self-confidence. His support helps his daughter develop a secure attachment and the independence needed to achieve her goals.

Father and Daughter illustrates the enduring bond between a father and his daughter from her childhood through adolescence to her professional success. The film challenges the stereotype that caregiving is exclusively a mother's role by showing the father's consistent presence and involvement in his daughter's life. His involvement at various stages demonstrates the long-term positive impact of a secure attachment with a father, influencing his daughter's emotional well-being and career achievements.

In the Pampers Love the Change campaign, fathers are shown changing diapers, soothing their babies, and bonding with them in everyday moments. This advertisement highlights the nurturing side of fatherhood, demonstrating that fathers are just as capable of providing care and emotional support to their children as mothers. "Fathers have a unique opportunity to demonstrate different forms of affection and play, contributing to a child's social, emotional, and cognitive development in ways that complement maternal caregiving" (Parke 107).

Similarly, the Dove Men+Care 'Calls for Dad' campaign features fathers as nurturing figures who are emotionally and practically present for their children. This series of advertisements depicts fathers comforting their

children, participating in daily routines, and being strong emotional presences in their lives.

Both campaign challenge traditional gender roles by depicting fathers as competent and nurturing caregivers, thus redefining societal expectations of fatherhood. These animated short films whether it's *Hair Love*, *One Small Step*, or *Father and Daughter* boldly challenge traditional gender roles by depicting fathers as capable and nurturing caregivers, on par with mothers.

Collectively, these short films compel viewers to reassess entrenched societal expectations regarding parental roles. By portraying fathers as nurturing and actively engaged in their children's lives, these narratives promote a more inclusive and diverse understanding of fatherhood. They inspire audiences to acknowledge and appreciate the diverse ways in which fathers contribute to their children's upbringing, emotional growth, and achievements. Ultimately, these stories advocate for a vision of parenting where roles are defined by love, care, and support rather than rigid gender stereotypes, fostering a more compassionate and equitable society for all families.

The National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine's Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development, during the beginning of the 21st century, formulated its policy around four central themes: early environment matter, biological and environmental influences, the importance of a comprehensive system and the role of policy and practice. Of these four major themes, they gave special emphasis on 'early environment matter and nurturing relationships as the development of children and their well-being are fostered by dependable relationships that offer love, nurturance, security, responsive interaction, and encouragement for exploration. Through statistical method and with the help of case studies, John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth arrived at the conclusion that emotional disturbances are found in early attachment-related experiences; and that development is disrupted without at least one relationship and the consequences will be long-lasting.

Though various researchers carried out their study on secure attachment, they all foregrounded the relationship children and mothers as mothers are the primary source of caregivers. Though both maternal and paternal caregiving systems are there, the main argument is that caregiving provided by them may substantially differ as there is difference in parenting behavior. Even Bowlby carefully chose the term 'attachment figure', and cautioned in generalizing these findings to fathers. It is this skepticism regarding fathers as caregivers that has

prompted this research.

The central argument that fathers can be nurturing caregivers, just like mothers, is supported by the positive impact of secure attachment in father-daughter relationships and the portrayal of such dynamics in animated short films. *Hair Love*, *One Small Step*, and *Father and Daughter*, each demonstrate how fathers can nurture self-esteem, academic achievement, and motivation in their daughters.

By presenting fathers as consistent sources of support and love, both *Father and Daughter* and *Dear Sophie* emphasize the positive impact fathers have on their daughters' development. Besides the selected short films, the commercial campaigns Pampers' Love the Change and Dove Men+Care's Calls for Dad too portray fathers as competent and nurturing caregivers. The Pampers campaign features fathers actively engaging in caregiving tasks, emphasizing that these responsibilities are not solely maternal. By showcasing fathers in nurturing roles, the campaign promotes the idea that caregiving is a shared responsibility and that fathers are equally capable of providing the necessary care and emotional support for their children. This redefinition of fatherhood encourages society to see fathers as integral to their children's upbringing, capable of forming deep emotional connections and fostering secure attachments.

The aim of this study was to place paternal caregiving as equally important as maternal care. However, recent studies by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development childcare shows that high quality daycare is also compatible with secure attachment of young children. The scope of future research in this area is extensive as secure attachment is a cross-cultural phenomenon with contextual differences. Further, incorporating neuroscience into this study is crucial, as individual differences in attachment can be seen at the neural level through the examination of the neural circuits and the neurotransmitter systems, offering insights into the neurobiology of parenting.

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Nature, Memory, and Political Trauma in Agha Shahid Ali's Poetry: An Ecocritical Reading

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Abstract— Agha Shahid Ali uses a lot of natural imagery in his poems about Kashmir. It helps him talk about memory and exile, and also the political trauma there. I am looking at how nature shows up in his work, not just as some pretty background, but more like it is watching everything that happened, the violence and all. The framework I am using is ecocriticism, mixed with postcolonial theory. It seems like that fits because Ali is dealing with both the land and the history of oppression. In poems from *The Country Without a Post Office*, and some others, the landscapes and seasons carry this emotional weight, like they hold onto the cultural memories. Close readings show how ecological metaphors do that, turning nature into something that remembers. I situate Ali in this postcolonial ecocriticism thing by looking at critics like Cheryll Glotfelty, Lawrence Buell, Rob Nixon. They help explain it. The paper, well, it's written in straightforward academic style, but the main point is how environmental stuff and human pain are all tied together in Ali's poetry. He makes the land a place for mourning, remembrance, and resisting, I think. That part gets a bit messy to unpack fully.



Keywords— Agha Shahid Ali, Ecocriticism, Exile, Kashmir, Memory, Political Trauma

I. INTRODUCTION

Agha Shahid Ali is definitely one of the most important voices in South Asian English poetry. And, of course, exile and yearning to belong are very prominent in his work, alongside issues of the politico-social context of Kashmir. Shahid himself did his stint of education in India and, subsequently, in America, but Kashmir in his imagination is definitely homeland of lostness and violence. Maybe the most striking thing in Shahid's world of poetry, and of his imagination, lies in the explicitly and all-pervasive construction of nature itself, mountains and snow and rivers and seasons and gardens that not only provide an environment but have content. This paper explains that “the use of natural imagery in Ali's poetry is both ethical and political” because these pieces showcase “the effects of conflict on both human and natural resources.” Through ecocritical reading, it is possible to interpret Ali's works from another perspective concerning “the effects of nature degradation on society.” The research adopts ecocritical reading perspective and postcolonial perspective in

interpreting the effects Ali brings in natural imagery because “the landscape of Kashmir is given a chance to live by means of an archive.”

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been considerable emphasis on the theme of exile, nostalgia, and violence in the critical studies on Agha Shahid Ali. Bruce King has discussed the context in which Agha Shahid Ali is situated in the modern Indian poetry tradition, which is being written in English. There has been an emphasis on the moral choices associated with the writing about Kashmir as a literary figure divided over memory and violence. “Ecocriticism, as defined by Cheryll Glotfelty, can thus be seen as the analysis of literary relations and relations to the environment, while Lawrence Buell lays his emphasis on the importance of ecological imagination and responsibility. In terms of the postcolonial environment, the area of consideration would include, for example, what has been termed ‘slow violence’ as expressed by Rob Nixon—that which ‘unfolds

progressively' and 'invisibly.' While there has been considerable scholarly focus on the 'political poetics of Ali's oeuvre,' ecocritical critiques in his poetry are yet unexamined."

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: ECOCRITICISM AND POSTCOLONIAL TRAUMA

Ecocriticism can be defined as an analysis of the way in which texts represent their idea of nature in response to these environmentalist concerns. Ecological degradation, in postcolonial worlds, becomes imbricated in the process of militarization, dispossession, and domination. In this way, as argued by Buell, environmentalist texts produce for their reader an identification of their duties toward nature. This particular idea can be supplemented by the theory of the slowness of violence articulated by Nixon. This discussion supports the analysis that follows regarding the poetry of Ali.

IV. NATURE AS WITNESS IN THE COUNTRY WITHOUT A POST OFFICE

Therefore, in *The Country Without a Post Office*, Ali offers the reader a vision of silence, emptiness, and interruptedness. To him, "communication breakdown is a symptom of political repression"; in a like manner, "The snow-stretched fields and dumb mountainscape betray a landscape petrified with fear, frozen with ice." Nature, therefore, "moves aside to shoulder the burden of collective grief and attests to a story that cannot be told." The ecological imagery in this piece works perfectly with Nixon's slow violence in that it shows harm that takes a progressive build-up. The damage is contained through silence by or through the land and environment affected by conflict.

V. MEMORY, EXILE, AND THE SHRINKING LANDSCAPE

In the poem "Postcard from Kashmir," the homeland is continuously shrinking, as claimed in the narration by Ali. Thus, the shrinking of the homeland has been linked to the agony because of the loss, which has been felt. Nature, acting as a warning, reminds the individual of the pictures of the homeland, ensuring the distances because of the exile.

VI. DISTANCE AND ECOLOGICAL SPECTRALITY

I See Kashmir from New Delhi at Midnight emphasizes

the existence of nature as an apparition. Nature, in terms of the river and mountains, appears as apparitions in the background, thus creating a contrast between memory and reality. In the paintings, it is clear that Ali depicts how nature has its voice even in the absence of the poet.

VII. CONCLUSION

An ecocritical reading of Agha Shahid Ali's poetry allows for the unfolding and interlacing of nature, memory, and political trauma. The landscape in his work comes into being as an active participant in history, a witness to violence, and a keeper of cultural memory. In so doing, linking environmental imagery with human suffering, Ali expands the scope of postcolonial ecocriticism and underlines the ethical imperative of such attention to ecological and cultural loss.

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Resistance and Resilience: The New Woman in Dalit Feminist Narratives

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Abstract— The present research examines the emergence of the “New Woman” in Dalit feminist narratives, highlighting both themes of resilience and resistance as they are expressed in Dalit women's writings and lives. The study examines how Dalit women resist gender and caste hierarchies while establishing conditions for self-identity and empowerment through a critical analysis of fictional and autobiographical works by authors such as Bama, Baby Kamble, and Urmila Pawar. According to the study, the New Woman in Dalit literature is a figure of transformation as well as uprising, redefining identity, regaining voice, and rebuilding community. The study reveals that these narratives, which emphasize the self-reliance, equality, and enduring spirit of Dalit women, express a significant counter-narrative to prevailing patriarchal and discriminatory notions. It evolves this by drawing on intersectional feminist theory and Dalit discourse. A vital lens through which to view the intersections of gender and caste in India is offered by Dalit feminist narratives. This essay examines the themes of resiliency and resistance in Dalit women writers' creative works, with a particular emphasis on the rise of the “New Woman.” This study demonstrates how Dalit women's literature challenges Brahminical patriarchy and reframes feminist discourse from a Dalit perspective through an analysis of the writings of Bama, Baby Kamble, and Urmila Pawar.



Keywords— New Women, Identify, Empowerment, Equality, Dalit, Feminism, Gender

I. INTRODUCTION

Dalit women's literary works offer a distinct counternarrative that challenges both conventional feminist discourses and Dalit male-centered narratives. Situated at the intersection of gender and caste oppression, Dalit feminism addresses the compounded marginalization experienced by Dalit women, in contrast to upper-caste feminist movements that often overlook caste as a critical axis of analysis. This paper explores how the Dalit feminist conceptualization of the “New Woman” is shaped by resilience and resistance. The study's intersectional feminist methodology draws on Dalit feminism, postcolonial studies, and subaltern theory, with important academic works by Uma Chakravarti, Gopal Guru, and Sharmila Rege as a foundation to examine Dalit women's literary manifestations of agency and resistance (Chakravarti 78; Guru 39; Rege 112). This exploration seeks to reveal the subversive potential embedded in their narratives,

highlighting how they negotiate and subvert patriarchal and casteist norms (Sethi and Nayak 138). Intersectionality is essential to understanding the experiences of Dalit women, who face discrimination based on their caste, class, gender, and disability (Dutt 177). Analyzing Dalit women's literature reveals that the “New Woman” is not merely an imitation of Western ideals but a figure rooted in their lived experiences, representing an assertion of dignity, self-respect, and the right to a life free from exploitation. Dalit women have historically been active agents of change, participating in anti-caste movements and challenging patriarchal structures within their communities (Samantaray). They often employ passive resistance tactics in their daily lives to counter oppression, as open resistance can sometimes be counterproductive (Sethi and Nayak 138).

Dalit women writers engage in a literary battle against gender and caste discrimination, using their craft to expose

societal inequalities and challenge prevailing historical narratives. Bama's semi-autobiographical novel *Karukku* critiques caste-based discrimination within the Catholic Church and society, with the protagonist resisting both religious and patriarchal structures through education and self-awareness (Chakravarti 78). Baby Kamble's memoir *The Prisons We Broke* provides a firsthand account of Dalit women's lived experiences, illustrating their resistance to caste-based exploitation and their involvement in Ambedkarite movements. Urmila Pawar's autobiography *The Weave of My Life* highlights the intersection of gender and caste oppression, tracing her journey from marginalization to empowerment. These literary works underscore the importance of education, agency, and collective action in challenging societal norms and attaining self-determination (Nayar 83). Dalit women writers challenge gender norms and societal expectations through their assertion of agency and self-expression, as their writings offer a powerful platform to voice their experiences, challenge stereotypes, and advocate for social justice (Nath 230). Despite facing numerous obstacles, Dalit women writers have produced a wealth of literature that serves as a testament to their resilience and determination. Dalit women's narratives often diverge from mainstream feminist perspectives, which tend to focus on the experiences of upper-caste women. These autobiographical accounts shed light on the harsh realities of domestic labor, motherhood, and social exclusion experienced by Dalit women (Nath 230). They also underscore the importance of solidarity and collective action in challenging the entrenched structures of caste and gender-based discrimination.

Resistance exemplifies the fight against oppression, while resilience underscores how Dalit women sustain their struggles despite adversity. Education emerges as a recurrent theme in Dalit women's literature, symbolizing empowerment and self-reliance. Collective action, often inspired by Ambedkarite ideology, further strengthens the resilience of Dalit women. Ultimately, Dalit women authors reclaim their histories, traditions, and voices, subverting dominant caste narratives. Dalit literature redefines historical and cultural narratives, amplifying voices that have long been marginalized. Dalit literature serves as a vital tool for social transformation, providing a platform for marginalized voices to challenge systemic oppression and advocate for a more just and equitable society (Martin 370).

Dalit feminist narratives are powerful literary expressions that highlight the intertwined oppression of caste, gender, and class. Rooted in lived experiences, these narratives often take the form of autobiographies and memoirs, challenging both upper-caste patriarchy and male-dominated Dalit discourse. Writers like Bama, Baby

Kamble, and Urmila Pawar use their voices to resist marginalization, assert identity, and reclaim cultural memory. Their works redefine feminism through the lens of caste, offering a sharp critique of mainstream feminist and Dalit movements that overlook Dalit women's unique struggles (Rege 112). By exposing the flaws of "Dalit patriarchy," these narratives initiate a theoretical rethinking of feminist and Dalit scholarship. These narratives promote critical awareness and empathy, prompting broader societal introspection and action. Literary endeavors have been instrumental in the establishment of counterpublics for Dalit women, permitting them to articulate their predicaments and challenges while fostering community and solidarity (Sarvesh, Singh, and Alam 91). In the face of social discrimination, physical violence, and abject poverty, Dalit women have shown resilience through self-organization and political consciousness (Hans). Dalit women are transforming the public sphere through digital activism, resisting dominant caste narratives, and mobilizing against discrimination (Thakur 360). Political participation and representation constitute fundamental pillars of a flourishing democratic society, yet for Dalit women in India, these concepts are often mediated through the complex intersections of caste, class, and gender (Mehrotra 59).

The concept of the "New Woman" in Dalit literary works challenges traditional gender roles and redefines agency. Unlike the archetype of the upper-caste feminist, the Dalit New Woman emerges from a history of caste-based oppression, advocating for both gender and caste equality. She is an activist, an intellectual, and a survivor who transforms her struggles into a means of empowerment for her community. The "New Woman" in Dalit literature represents a strong, self-aware, and resistant Dalit woman who challenges both caste and patriarchal oppression. Unlike the traditional portrayal of women as submissive or silent sufferers, the New Woman reclaims her identity, asserts her voice, and becomes an agent of change. Through education, activism, and self-expression, she redefines her role in society, challenging historical and contemporary forms of marginalization. She embodies not just individual liberation but also collective empowerment (Cherechés, "The Resilience of Caste"). The narrative exclusion of women whose bodily autonomy has been compromised is challenged by the self-representation and assertion of agency in Dalit women's narratives (Daya 97).

Key Characteristics of the New Woman in Dalit Literature:

- Awareness of Caste and Gender Oppression
- Assertion of Self and Identity
- Resistance to Patriarchal Norms

- Pursuit of Education and Autonomy
- Commitment to Social Justice and Activism

Dalit women's literary works showcase their resistance against various forms of oppression, including domestic violence, religious hypocrisy, and patriarchal norms. These narratives highlight the everyday acts of rebellion and the transformative journeys of Dalit women, as exemplified in the works of Urmila Pawar and Baby Kamble. Dalit literature offers a lens into the lives of marginalized communities and serves as a testament to the resilience and agency of Dalit women (Guha 85). The concept of the "New Woman" in Dalit literature is not an idealized construct but a grounded representation of Dalit women's strength, which lies in their ability to survive, resist, and transform their lived realities (Kamble 54). Dalit feminist narratives illustrate the interplay of resistance and resilience that define this New Woman. Through a close examination of literary works by Bama, Baby Kamble, and Urmila Pawar, this paper demonstrates how Dalit women's literature not only critiques systemic oppression but also paves the way for self-assertion and collective liberation. Dalit women have long occupied marginal positions, excluded from both the Feminist and Dalit Movements (Emmadi et al. 1619).

The scholarship on feminism in India must recognize the distinct voices of Dalit women, as their narratives foreground the intersections of caste, class, and gender, in contrast to the often caste-blind perspectives of upper-caste feminist discourses. The concept of the "New Woman" in Dalit feminist literature departs from elite feminist constructs and colonial modernity, offering a deeply grounded representation of resistance rooted in the lived experiences of Dalit women. Dalit women's autobiographical and testimonial writings challenge both Brahminical patriarchy and Dalit male-centric discourse, carving out a new literary space for women's self-articulation and community-centered narratives. Intersectional approaches are essential for understanding and addressing the complex and interconnected systems of oppression that affect Dalit women. Intersectionality offers a valuable framework for examining the experiences of Dalit women, as it recognizes the interconnected systems of oppression based on race, gender, and class (Cherechés, "Unveiling the Oppressed Body" 63; Raman 272).

II. RESILIENCE IS SEEN IN THEIR EVERYDAY ACTS OF SURVIVAL

Dalit women, exemplified by figures like Bama, demonstrate remarkable resilience through their pursuit of education, support for their families, and unwavering refusal to be defeated by constant humiliation and social

ostracism. Their unwavering determination and strong-willed perseverance in the face of adversity are powerfully captured in Baby Kamble's depictions of her mother and other Dalit women. These women possess a quiet yet profound strength, enduring hardship and injustice without surrendering their essential sense of self. Dalit women have historically occupied marginalized positions, often excluded from both the feminist and Dalit movements, yet they have creatively leveraged their "outsider-within" status to articulate their experiences (Emmadi et al. 1619). Resistance, on the other hand, often manifests in more subtle but deeply transformative ways. It appears in the refusal to conform to restrictive caste roles, the questioning of religious hypocrisy, and the courageous act of writing their own stories. These women resist not only external oppression but also the internalized shame and silence imposed upon them. Their act of writing becomes a profound political statement, a reclaiming of voice, agency, and historical narrative. Seemingly mundane acts, such as refusing to eat leftover food, walking on "forbidden" paths, or speaking out against injustice, become radical in a society deeply rooted in caste obedience. Dalit women, who constitute a significant portion of the Dalit population, navigate lives often marked by hardship, yet their historical and contemporary activism remains a powerful force, particularly at the grassroots level where they form the backbone of many Dalit movements (Samantaray).

Ultimately, the narratives of Dalit women are not merely testimonies of suffering, but rather, documents of power, courage, and transformation. Their resilience keeps them standing firm, while their resistance propels them forward, challenging the very structures that seek to erase or subjugate them. In revealing their multi-dimensional experiences shaped by the convergence of caste, gender, class, and disability, Dalit women unmask the intricate systems of discrimination that fuel social stratification and constrain access to resources and advancement within Indian society (Dutt 177). Emerging in the 1980s, intersectionality offers a framework to investigate the interconnected systems of oppression encountered by women, particularly Black women, based on race, gender, and class, thereby offering a valuable lens through which to examine the experiences of Dalit women. Acknowledging the multifaceted nature of Dalit women's identities, which extend beyond the singular categories of "woman" or "Dalit," and recognizing the complex interplay of various forms of oppression, intersectionality offers a nuanced framework to understand the specific challenges faced by Dalit women. This empowers efforts to dismantle the structures that perpetuate their marginalization. Bama's works, particularly *Karukku* and *Sangati*, powerfully depict themes of resistance against the intertwined oppressions of

caste and gender, rooted in the lived experiences of Dalit communities. In *Karukku*, Bama utilizes her narrative as a form of protest, highlighting the injustices she encountered as a Dalit Christian woman within both the Catholic Church and educational institutions. Her act of writing in Tamil and sharing her testimony becomes a resistance to the dominant upper-caste discourses that often exclude marginalized voices (Cherechés, "The Resilience of Caste"). In *Sangati*, resistance takes on a more collective form, focusing on the everyday lives of Dalit women who confront the dual burden of caste and patriarchy. Through shared stories, humor, labor, and mutual support, these women resist the societal norms that seek to silence and oppress them. Both texts depict resistance not only in overt rebellion but also in small, everyday acts, such as sending girls to school, rejecting dowry, questioning authority, or simply surviving with dignity. By centering Dalit women's voices and experiences, Bama challenges historical erasure and creates a space for asserting their identity and agency, making her work a powerful act of literary and social resistance (Padmapriya).

Bama's literary works, particularly the texts *Karukku* and *Sangati*, explore the themes of resilience and resistance in the lived experiences of Dalits, especially Dalit women. Her writings highlight the systemic discrimination and oppression faced by this marginalized community, while also documenting their remarkable ability to endure, challenge, and transform their circumstances. The autobiographical narrative of *Karukku* serves not only as a personal testimony but also as an act of witnessing and documenting the trauma and strategies for survival within the Dalit community (Nayar 83). In *Karukku*, Bama recounts a formative childhood incident that sparked her awareness of the injustice of caste-based hierarchies. This emotional response marked the beginning of her journey toward critical consciousness and resistance. Bama's pursuit of education, despite facing caste-based discrimination, demonstrates her determination to use knowledge as a tool to challenge societal norms and share her story. Through her autobiography, Bama redirects focus onto herself and other Dalit women, reclaiming their dignity and creating a unique identity for them (Smriti 113).

Sangati, on the other hand, shifts the focus to the collective resilience of Dalit women. Bama documents their ability to find strength in each other, even as they confront physical labor, domestic violence, and poverty. The women's sense of humor, solidarity, and sheer survival is portrayed as a form of resistance against the dehumanizing forces of caste and patriarchy. Furthermore, Bama's narrative style, characterized by its raw authenticity and unapologetic portrayal of Dalit life, disrupts traditional literary

conventions that often marginalize or misrepresent marginalized communities (Rajendran 89).

Bama's critique of institutional casteism within the Catholic Church, as well as her decision to leave the convent and continue her struggle independently, underscores her moral resilience and the courage to act on her convictions. Additionally, Bama's choice to write in the Tamil dialect of her community asserts the validity of their experiences and reclaims narrative authority for Dalit voices that have historically been excluded from mainstream discourse. Through this book, Bama makes an impactful appeal to her fellow folks—the Dalits and, in particular, to the Dalit women—to join hands together in re-conceptualizing and re-asserting their collective as well as individual identities so as to claim their rightful place in the Indian social order (Singh 105). Baby Kamble and Urmila Pawar's autobiographical writings powerfully depict how Dalit women resist oppression and demonstrate remarkable resilience. Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* critiques the dehumanizing Brahmanical caste system, challenging both societal exclusion and patriarchal norms within the Dalit community. Her narrative, inspired by Ambedkar's vision, uses education and Buddhism to reject caste hierarchy. Kamble also highlights Dalit women's endurance in the face of hunger, violence, and marginalization, describing their relentless struggles to ensure their children's survival (Pai et al.).

Dalit women's resilience and resistance are powerfully depicted in the narratives of Bama, Baby Kamble, and Urmila Pawar. Their writings challenge dominant caste and gender oppression, using personal stories, political consciousness, and collective struggle to assert Dalit women's agency and strength. Pawar's work, in particular, highlights the intersection of caste and gender, critiquing the limitations of upper-caste feminism. Her resilience is reflected in her commitment to narration, education, and community-building, as well as her spiritual and ideological embrace of Buddhism. Together, these authors present Dalit womanhood not as passive, but as actively resisting and transforming their worlds through memory, writing, and collective action. Dalit women possess a unique and powerful form of resistance that is expressed through their distinct language and communication styles (Sethi and Nayak 138).

Bama, Baby Kamble, and Urmila Pawar each depict resistance and resilience in distinct ways shaped by their personal and social contexts. Bama's *Karukku* centers on individual resistance through education and rejecting oppressive religious structures, while her resilience stems from writing despite isolation. Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* reflects collective resistance inspired by

Ambedkarite ideology, critiquing caste, and patriarchy, with her resilience shown in raising community consciousness. Pawar's *The Weave of My Life* blends personal narrative with political engagement, as her resistance lies in feminist activism and her resilience in navigating multiple marginalizations. Together, their narratives demonstrate diverse modes of challenging injustice—Bama's struggle, Kamble's collective activism, and Pawar's intersectional critique—highlighting the strength and agency of Dalit women. Intersectional analysis posits that individuals possess multifaceted identities, thereby moving beyond simplistic, single-axis categorizations such as "woman" or "Dalit," and instead, foregrounding the complex interplay of various forms of oppression that shape lived experience and social inequality. Applying an intersectional lens to the experiences of Dalit women illuminates how caste-based discrimination intersects with gender inequality, economic exploitation, and other forms of marginalization to create unique challenges and barriers. Dalit women actively carve out spaces for enjoyment and entertainment amid hardship, particularly within their work environments (Sethi and Nayak 138).

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: DALIT FEMINISM AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Dalit feminism challenges both gender and caste oppression. According to Gopal Guru, "Dalit women talk differently," reflecting a unique experience not covered by Savarna feminism. Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality theory is crucial, as Dalit women's oppression stems from the intersection of caste, gender, class, and often religion. Chakravarti's concept of graded patriarchies, situated within the overarching structure of Brahmanical patriarchy, elucidates the distinct and often intensified forms of oppression endured by Dalit women, acknowledging that patriarchal power manifests and operates in nuanced ways contingent upon the specific caste location of women (Chakravarti 52). Sharmila Rege argues that Dalit women's writing in a testimonial mode is a form of "counter-memory," resisting dominant narratives of history and identity (Kottaparamban et al. 24). Paik adds that education and writing are tools of survival and revolution for Dalit women, helping them rebuild their identities in modern India (Paik 145). Dalit women have been marginalized in both the mainstream feminist movement and the Dalit movement. Dalit women writers challenge both caste and gender norms, as Bama encourages fellow Dalits and Dalit women to unite and redefine their identities to claim their rightful place in Indian society. Both Black American and Dalit literature share a sphere of convergence, as they are oppositional and resistant to the exploitations and

persecutions imposed on them by the "superior" race and caste. Dalit women's writing suffers from the same kind of condescension that is experienced by Black women's writing in that they are seldom considered mainstream (Mukhopadhyay 88). Given the risks of retaliation and backlash that Dalits frequently face when overtly defying or challenging the established social order, open resistance can potentially prove detrimental to their well-being and safety. Acknowledging the severe consequences that may result from directly challenging authority, Dalit women often employ subtle, nuanced, and indirect approaches to navigate and, at times, subvert the oppressive systems governing their daily lives, thereby carving out spaces of agency within highly constraining environments (Mittal 37).

IV. REPRESENTATION OF RESISTANCE IN DALIT FEMINIST NARRATIVES

Dalit feminist authors employ both aesthetic and political resistance strategies in their literature. They challenge conventional narrative structures, eschew sanitized language, and assert their political subjectivity.

4.1 Bama's *Karukku*: Language as Resistance

In her work *Karukku*, Bama disrupts traditional literary conventions by incorporating Tamil linguistic structures into her English narration. This linguistic nonconformity serves as an affirmation of her cultural identity. Bama's decision to leave the Christian convent, after recognizing its casteist structures, reflects her growing political consciousness (Bama, *Karukku* 85). As scholar Rege observes, this form of self-expression represents a "writing from the wound." This is a calculated divergence from the established literary norms of the upper castes, symbolizing a rejection of their cultural hegemony and an assertion of Dalit self-expression (Smriti 113).

4.2 Urmila Pawar: Memory and Reclamation

Urmila Pawar's text, *The Weave of My Life*, interweaves recollections of oral tradition, familial history, and political activism. Pawar portrays the "New Woman" as a figure who adeptly navigates between conventional domestic duties and contemporary political consciousness (Pawar 44). The work underscores education and the philosophies of Ambedkar as transformative instruments. Pawar's narratives serve as a critical lens through which to examine the complex, interwoven layers of oppression that Dalit women face, encompassing not only caste-based discrimination but also gender inequality and class-based exploitation, thereby amplifying the urgency for social justice and equality (Emmadi et al. 1620).

4.3 Baby Kamble: Redefining the Domestic

In her work, *The Prisons We Broke*, Baby Kamble provides a critical analysis of both caste-based patriarchy and oppressive structures within the Dalit community. Kamble depicts the household as a space of perseverance and resistance, underscoring how the mere survival of Dalit women is an inherently political act. Her critique of internalized caste hierarchies aligns with Crenshaw's assertion that oppression manifests in multifaceted ways (Kamble 56). Dalit women writers have successfully achieved the goal of representing the sexuality and sexually-charged language of Dalit women, which is a powerful disruption of the feminine in that it refuses to play to patriarchal expectations about feminine decorum (Hubel 299).

V. RESILIENCE AND THE ETHICS OF SURVIVAL

Dalit women's literary works underscore resilience as a purposeful, communal, and political endeavor. As Satyanarayana and Tharu articulate, these narratives are not merely individual expressions of hardship but collective assertions of selfhood, survival, and historical identity (Sharma 45). In the literary works of Jonathan and Akkarmashi, the protagonists confront systematic marginalization, yet ultimately develop as critical intellectuals and authors. This transition from enduring oppression to asserting their agency encapsulates the ethos of the Dalit New Woman (Festino 28). Yashica Dutt's autobiographical narrative, *Coming Out as Dalit*, provides a modern exemplification of resilience. By disclosing her identity, the text confronts both societal and academic exclusion (Maurya 97).

VI. LANGUAGE, SILENCE, AND VOICE

Dalit women authors assert their voice and language as means of resistance. Bama's unconventional narrative structure and Pawar's intertextual incorporation of oral histories challenge both conventional literary aesthetics and Savarna (upper-caste Hindu) sensibilities. According to Rawat and Satyanarayana, this narrative approach constitutes a form of counter-canon, rewriting history from the margins (James and Mathew 122). The break from silence is deliberate and urgent. These women write not merely to tell stories, but to redefine the very foundations of knowledge and legitimacy. Gayatri Spivak questioned whether the subaltern (the marginalized) can speak—Dalit women's literature responds resoundingly in the affirmative, as they raise their voices loudly (Preeti 64).

VII. THE DALIT NEW WOMAN: FROM PASSIVE TO ACTIVE

The Dalit New Woman is an active agent who constructs her own identity, rather than passively receiving modernity. The poems and narratives in *Still I Rise* demonstrate a confident expression of women's subjective experiences (Guru 103). These women embody multifaceted roles, transcending the limited characterizations of mother and worker to also encompass activist, leader, and theorist identities. This representation challenges colonial depictions of the "modern woman" and instead aligns with Ambedkarite principles of dignity, equality, and justice. Dalit women writers, through their literary contributions, have strategically utilized their marginality—their unique position as "outsider-within"—to articulate their lived experiences and critique the dominant narratives of both the feminist and Dalit movements, thereby enriching the discourse on social justice and equality (Pan 211).

VIII. CONCLUSION

The Dalit feminist narratives examined in this study challenge and redefine the landscape of Indian literature and feminist discourse. The empowered female protagonists depicted in these works do not simply resist, but proactively rewrite the cultural scripts that have historically marginalized them. They are portrayed as resilient, educated, politically engaged, and self-determined individuals. By engaging with autobiographical accounts, testimonies, and intersectional feminist theory, this paper has illuminated how Dalit literature articulates a language of resistance grounded in historical context and oriented toward emancipation. As scholar Rege observes, these women are not seeking inclusion within existing frameworks, but are creating entirely new frameworks altogether.

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Transforming Taboos: Ecofeminism, Menstruation, and Spirituality in Maya Chowdhry's *Monsoon*

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Abstract— This paper delves into Maya Chowdhry's *Monsoon* through an interdisciplinary lens, examining its exploration of menstruation, ecological renewal, and feminine identity. The analysis situates *Monsoon* within feminist ecological literature and performative representations of women's experiences, emphasizing its critical engagement with societal taboos and cultural renewal. By integrating concepts from psychoanalysis, ecological feminism, Indian aesthetics, and postcolonial hybridity, the study highlights the play's innovative approach to reframing abjection and celebrating cycles of life and empowerment.



Keywords— abjection, body politics, cultural taboos, ecofeminism, feminist theatre

I. INTRODUCTION

Maya Chowdhry's *Monsoon*, first broadcasted as a BBC radio play, is a seminal drama of South Asian diasporic theatre as it seamlessly addresses societal taboos, such as female sexuality, menstruation, and queer love, as sites for political and spiritual transformation. It intertwines the natural and personal, the ecological and the feminine. Her staging of menstruation detangles it from its moralizing cultural stigma as well as reductive biomedical pathologization. In her author notes, she mentions that the genesis of the play occurred with the meditated juxtaposition of the cycles of monsoon and menstruation, how both are associated with the color red and an expectation of transformation.

Maya Chowdhry, an acclaimed British South Asian playwright and poet, is known for her experimental narratives and focus on intersectional identities. *Monsoon* began its creative journey as a poem titled "Menstrual Monsoon," which Chowdhry described as exploring parallels between the monsoon's rejuvenating power and the menstrual cycle's renewal. Initially submitted to the B.B.C. Young Playwrights' Festival, the play evolved through various drafts, including a monologue and a narrative about two sisters, before becoming the intimate love story and spiritual journey it is today. The production

was shaped by producer Frances Ann Solomon, whose workshops and direction helped refine its experimental nature.

First performed and broadcast in the early 1990s, *Monsoon* garnered attention for its bold exploration of taboos surrounding menstruation and lesbian love, sparking both controversy and acclaim. The play's innovative use of sound, particularly the tabla and flute, alongside evocative natural sounds such as thunder and rain, underscores its performative and auditory depth. As a narrative deeply rooted in themes of cultural heritage, love, and natural cycles, *Monsoon* remains a pioneering work that challenges and expands the boundaries of feminist theatre.

By aligning menstrual cycles with the monsoon's regenerative power, Chowdhry creates a layered metaphor for life, fertility, and ecological balance, providing a fertile ground for feminist, psychoanalytic, and aesthetic interpretations. The play reframes abjection associated with menstruation by embedding it within a spiritual and cultural dialogue, where symbols such as the monsoon or Hindu goddesses challenge traditional categorical boundaries of purity and impurity, while fostering a discourse on inclusivity and empowerment. The narrative serves as an ecological meditation, love narrative, trauma testimony, and an embodied re-vision of heteronormative

and patriarchal restrictions placed on women's desires and bodies.

The play is rooted in a historical understanding of menstruation that, as scholar Jyotna Chawla notes, can be traced to ancient Hindu texts. In a legend from the Vedas, the god Indra kills a learned scholar, Brahmin and, to absolve his guilt, he asks women to carry this burden each month through menstruation. This ancient story became the foundation for menstrual restrictions that persist in contemporary South Asia. It converted a bodily process originally understood as connected to cosmic order (*rta*) into a vehicle of pollution and sin. *Monsoon* emerges as a deliberate contestation of this history, refusing both Western medical privatization and South Asian patriarchal sacralization of menstrual shame.

The article contends that *Monsoon* enacts ecofeminist queer resistance through four interrelated theoretical registers, each of which requires significant critical attention. First, by foregrounding menstrual abjection, bodily control, and queer intimacy, the play presents abjection as a form of political refusal. Second, by representing diaspora, the impossibility of return, and the condition of ongoing in-betweenness, the play maps what Homi Bhabha describes as the "Third Space." This is a space in which the postcolonial female subject can speak, desire, and resist beyond the limits of both Western liberal frameworks and patriarchal tradition. Third, by repeatedly linking menstruation with the monsoon at both formal and thematic levels, the play develops a distinctly South Asian ecofeminism grounded in goddess-centered spirituality, where women's bodies are understood as part of wider ecological and sacred cycles. Lastly, the article analyses the play through the lens of Indian aesthetic theories, particularly *rasa* and *dhvani*, suggesting that the affective intensity in the play is built on the principles articulated in the *Natyashastra*.

Chowdhry draws on what Sara Ahmed calls the "cultural politics of emotion," which understands bodily processes and emotions as social forces that shape how power is experienced and resisted. By placing menstruation at the centre of the play, through Jalaarnava's diary, poetic interludes, and its connection to monsoon cycles, the play makes this politics visible on stage. The stigmatization of menstruation can be further understood through Sara Ahmed's concept of affective economies, which examines how emotions circulate and "stick" to bodies, creating social boundaries. Menstruation is marked by disgust, which Ahmed describes as shaping "the bodies of a community of the disgusted through how it sticks objects together" (Ahmed 82). This framing renders menstruation abject, justifying its exclusion from public spaces and social norms. Shame further reinforces this stigma,

compelling menstruators to conceal their experiences to align with societal ideals of propriety, perpetuating silence and invisibility. Ahmed argues that emotions "produce the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow the individual and the social to be delineated" (Ahmed 10), explaining how disgust and shame create divisions that marginalize menstruators. Addressing this stigma involves dismantling the emotional frameworks that sustain it and challenging cultural narratives that frame menstruation as impure or disruptive.

The narrative follows Jalaarnava, a nineteen-year-old British South Asian woman, as she travels to India in search of cultural belonging and self-understanding. Moving from Chandigarh to Kashmir, where she lives in an all-female household on a houseboat, her journey foregrounds themes of mobility, vulnerability, and negotiation across cultural and linguistic boundaries. As scholars such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty (*Under Western Eyes*, 1988) and Mary Louise Pratt (*Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 1992) have shown, women's travel in postcolonial contexts often becomes a site of self-formation shaped by power, gender, and location. Jalaarnava's journey similarly stages travel as a process of negotiating insider-outsider positions within a complex socio-political landscape.

II. ABJECTION, TRAUMA, AND QUEER RESISTANCE: PSYCHOANALYTIC EXPLORATIONS

For analytical clarity, this section limits its theoretical framework to three scholars. Julia Kristeva, whose *Powers of Horror* provides a foundational lens for interpreting menstruation as abject, disrupting culturally maintained boundaries between the clean and unclean, self and other. Secondly, Sara Ahmed's *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* extends this analysis by exploring how emotions such as disgust and shame circulate within affective economies to uphold societal hierarchies. And finally, Shalini Shah's theorization of the material history of the female body in South Asian literature.

Shah's analysis of Sanskrit literature shows how patriarchal conceptualization and control render the female body into a colonized terrain. In Sanskrit poetry and law writings, the female body is simultaneously portrayed as a pollutant, a vessel (*yoni*), an arousal of masculine desire, and a need for continual disciplinary monitoring. Shah's examination of the *pativrata* (wifely devotion) concept is extremely significant. Instead of using overt physical force, the *Dharmasastras* created a system of psychological compliance in which women absorbed demands for control and chastity while being watchful of their own sexuality. Menstruating women are prohibited

from washing, eating, touching sacred artifacts, and entering temples or mosques. Shah describes these restrictions as psychological colonization, which results in conformity at the level of subjectivity itself. When Nusrat admits in *Monsoon* that she is unable to cook or visit the mosque on her “unclean days,” it enacts this genealogy in which the bodies of menstruation women are viewed as harmful and need to be segregated.

Yet in *Monsoon*, menstruation operates as more than a mechanism of exclusion; it is reimagined as a site of resistance and creative transformation. Psychoanalytic frameworks, including Lacanian and feminist insights, unravel how the protagonist Jalaarnava's experiences engage with deeper dimensions of trauma, desire, and the unconscious. Kristeva defines abjection as that which “disturbs identity, system, order... what does not respect borders, positions, rules” (Kristeva 4). Menstruation epitomizes abjection as it breaches bodily boundaries, making the invisible visible and threatening societal norms of cleanliness and control. Jalaarnava's menstruation is labelled “unclean,” barring her from religious rituals and reinforcing her exclusion. This aligns with Kristeva's assertion that abjection maintains symbolic order by designating certain bodies and processes as impure. *Monsoon*'s intervention, however, is to reject the stigma associated with this natural process. The menstruation body is transformed from an object of shame into an archive, a narrative, and an accumulation of knowledge by Jalaarnava's monthly journal, which is marked with the symbols “E” (energy) and “I” (irritability). By asserting that the menstrual body is a knowable and mappable phenomena rather than an abject occurrence that must be hidden, this record represents resistance.

Upon Jalaarnava's initial presentation of her diary to her sister Kavita, the subsequent dialogue, while seemingly humorous, serves to denaturalize shame: Kavita's bewilderment regarding the capacity of menstrual blood to fill a bucket, her astonishment at the sufficiency of a towel, and Jalaarnava's patient elucidations anchor the menstruating body in the ordinary, the tangible, and the comprehensible discourse. This domestication of this taboo subject, its commencement from silence to vocalization, from shame to knowledge, formulates the first step of the play's redemptive picturing of the ‘abject.’ This engagement with the ‘abject’ amplifies during the protagonist's stay in Kashmir, when her menstruation period converges with her spiritual awakening, sexual desire, and environmental catastrophe. The diary entry dated April 4th, wherein Jalaarnava recounts her ritualistic incineration of her menstrual products in a secluded alley, termed “a ceremony of blood to ashes,” is exemplary. The scene shows Jalaarnava taking her used pads and tampons outside, secretly burning them one by one in a small fire,

instead of just throwing them away like rubbish. In doing this, she treats her menstrual blood as something important that deserves a careful, almost ceremonial goodbye, not as dirty waste to be hidden. This kind of action is similar to ecofeminist and goddess-based traditions where menstruation is seen as powerful and sacred, and where the bleeding body is honoured through simple rituals rather than being treated with shame.

The play candidly explores menstruation; a subject often shrouded in cultural taboo. Reminiscing her writing process, Chowdhry recollects, “During the research I spent many days staring at a map of the onset of the South East Monsoon, looking for clues and insights. Some days I don't know where the writing came from. The ghosts of many women touched my pen.” In *Monsoon*, menstruation is reclaimed as a natural and powerful phenomenon, linking the characters' personal experiences to the rhythms of nature. Jalaarnava's menstrual diary becomes a symbolic tool, helping her understand her body's connection to the world. “I feel wet and heavy, bloated and weak,” Jalaarnava writes, capturing the shared physical reality of menstruation. By articulating menstruation as a shared, intimate physical reality, the play dismantles cultural taboos and constructs a sense of unified womanhood grounded in empathy and co-affection.

Ahmed's concept of affective economies further elucidates how emotions like disgust and shame “stick” to menstruating bodies. In *Monsoon*, disgust is not an individual response but a collective affect that sustains exclusionary practices. Ahmed argues, “Emotions work to align some bodies with others and against other bodies” (10). Nusrat's internalized shame about her menstruation, evident when she calls it “my unclean day,” exemplifies how cultural narratives regulate bodily experiences and enforce conformity. By exposing these dynamics, *Monsoon* queers the abjection of menstruation, challenging its stigmatisation.

Chowdhry represents the female body as a contested space shaped by cultural forces. Shah asserts, “...it is not biology per se but the ways in which the social system organises and gives meaning to the biological body that is oppressive to women,” a critique vividly echoed in Jalaarnava's experiences (32). Shah elucidates this idea by asserting how patriarchal ideologies inscribe cultural meanings onto biological realities, perpetuating gender inequalities through socially constructed norms. She critiques the patriarchal conflation of womanhood with biological functions, emphasizing how cultural narratives inscribe meaning onto the female body. This is vividly illustrated in Jalaarnava's lament over her menstrual cycle, described as “a war brewing in my belly” (Chowdhry, Act 3, Scene 6). This metaphor encapsulates the dual pressures of cultural

stigma and personal struggle, positioning her body as a site of both imposed narratives and the potential for reclaiming agency.

More drastically, Chowdhry uses poetic sublimation to produce what one may refer to as the recovery of abjection. Instead of depicting Jalaarnava's heaviest menstrual flow as disease, the drama introduces a poetic intervention:

"The heavens have opened / and my womb has shed her lining / and flows endlessly / for days. / The flesh of Durga / fighting for change / the hungry red earth heaving / and growing" (Chowdhry, 1993, p. 67).

Chowdhry places heavy menstruation in a mythological register that predates the Brahmanical contamination mindset that Chawla traces by calling upon Durga, the Hindu goddess of war, destruction, and regeneration. Menstrual blood represents cosmic strength rather than sin, as Indra's curse would have it, because of Durga's cosmic battles and personification of creative destruction. By portraying the menstrual woman as bearing part in cycles of terrestrial generation and rejuvenation, the phrase "hungry red earth heaving and growing" further ecofeminizes menstruation.

One of the most delicate and politically significant examples of queer South Asian intimacy in postcolonial theater is the romance between Jalaarnava and Nusrat. Chowdhry's narrative also grapples with taboos surrounding love and sexuality. The evolving relationship between Jalaarnava and Nusrat challenges patriarchal expectations and heteronormative constructs. "I want to give myself to you," Jalaarnava confesses to Nusrat, a moment that encapsulates their shared transformation. Interestingly, *Monsoon* declines to use a false or heteronormative resolution. Rather, the play depicts their interaction as what Bracha Ettinger refers to as a matrixial encounter-event, a place where two partial subjects co-emerge, bordlink, and co-fade without losing their individuality or dissolving into merging. It posits the borderspace as a realm where subjectivity is formed through shared encounters rather than separations. This space operates through what Ettinger calls "metamorphosis," a process of mutual transformation occurring between entities in relational proximity. *Monsoon* enacts this matrixial logic through multiple strategies. When Jalaarnava and Nusrat make love on the floating garden, the play stages their bodies as permeable and mutually transforming:

"JALAARNAVA: By candle light / I moved on her / through her / into her body / bells on ribbons / of bangles / and janjura / ankles curved like. NUSRAT: Red blood mendhi / on palms soft and / sweet / licking taste of / chilli and masala / touch of silk on / my skin, thighs / arch

of my movement / up and into / earth, water, blood" (Chowdhry, 1993, p. 72).

Matrixial borderlinking is enacted through the interweaving of these two lyrical voices, which are both distinct and poignant. Instead of abstract transcendence, the sensory distinctiveness (bangles, mendhi, masala) bases love in physical experience. "Up and into / earth, water, blood" is the final line, that places their love-making amid broader cycles of elemental transformation.

As Ettinger describes, this borderspace is a realm of mutual transformation where boundaries between self and others dissolve. Jalaarnava's deepening relationship with Nusrat exemplifies this: their bond is both intimate and transformative, reshaping their identities and breaking societal norms. Nusrat's role in Jalaarnava's life reflects Ettinger's idea that relationships are not merely interactions but spaces of shared becoming. As Jalaarnava reflects on her experiences, the monsoon rains serve as a potent metaphor for renewal and interconnectedness, embodying the fluidity of the Matrixial borderspace.

The monsoon itself serves as a central metaphor, encapsulating the themes of renewal and relationality. Just as the rains rejuvenate the parched earth, the shared experiences between Jalaarnava and Nusrat nurture their emotional and psychological growth. Chowdhry writes, "The heavens have opened. A gift from the Goddess to be able to create life," drawing a direct connection between the natural and the divine, the personal and the universal. This imagery aligns with Ettinger's use of water as a symbol of the Matrixial borderspace, where subjectivities blend and evolve.

III. POSTCOLONIAL DIASPORAS: HYBRIDITY, BELONGING, AND THE POLITICS OF RETURN

The "Third Space" theory developed by Homi K. Bhabha offers crucial theoretical terminology for comprehending *Monsoon's* portrayal of postcolonial identity and diasporic awareness. According to Bhabha, the Third Space is a "contested arena where meanings are negotiated and identities reshaped" rather than an idealized area of cultural synthesis. In this intermediary state, the colonized individual neither fully integrates into the colonizer's culture nor adheres to an essentialist "original" culture. New hybrid identities arise through contingent negotiation, exemplifying what Bhabha refers to as "mimicry," a process in which the colonized subject adheres to colonial culture while concurrently undermining its authority through deliberate repetition and deviation.

Jalaarnava's journey to Kashmir portrays precisely this Third Space consciousness. As a British-Indian woman, she is neither wholly British nor wholly Indian; she yearns for a homeland she could belong fully to. Her arrival in Chandigarh during the summer heat, her anticipation of the monsoon, her attempt to inhabit an "Indian" identity while remaining culturally alienated—all these characteristics demonstrate her perpetually in-between state. When she attempts to communicate with the warden at the youth hostel during her travels, switching between English and Hindi, she enacts a gendered diaspora experience: the perpetual negotiation between linguistic systems, cultural codes, and modes of belonging that never fully stabilize.

The play reiterates on the impossibility of an authentic homecoming. Jalaarnava searches for something "truly Indian," some ground of legitimacy that might heal her hybrid consciousness. Yet Kashmir extends not homecoming but further estrangement. She is perceived as a tourist, as westernised, as too mobile, too independent, too sexual, all things hinting at her irreducible foreignness. Nusrat's initial suspicion, "You're Indian, aren't you? I didn't think Indians stayed here," accentuates how Jalaarnava's hybrid status makes her legible as outsider even within her presumed homeland. The recurring water imagery underscores this impossible return. Jalaarnava arrives during the dry season and awaits the monsoon; she exists in a liminal temporality of waiting, of not-yet-belonging, of anticipation without resolution. The monsoon itself becomes the figure of what can never be fully possessed or inhabited, it arrives, transforms, and departs, leaving no stable ground of belonging.

The play's staging of Jalaarnava's attempt to inhabit an "Indian" identity further enacts the performativity of postcolonial subjectivity. She switches between English and Hindi, attempts to adopt Indian dress, seeks to understand Indian customs and spirituality. Yet these performances of Indianness remain marked as performance, as strategic adoption rather than as authentic return. The play thus stages what Bhabha identifies as the "slippage" inherent in colonial mimicry, the way that the colonized subject's imitation of the colonizer's (or, in this case, of an imagined "original") culture simultaneously reveals the constructed nature of all identity and destabilizes the authority of the original.

The diasporic experience is significantly influenced by gender, as evidenced by Zerine Alam's analysis of colonial women's journey narratives. Women in diaspora undergo what Alam refers to as the "unsettling of defined identities," where patriarchal family dynamics, religious duties, and gendered mobility constraints exacerbate the

intricate negotiations of hybrid identity. Jalaarnava's expedition to India is facilitated solely by familial duty and her sister's presence; her choice to journey alone to Kashmir elicits Massi's concern ("It's not safe, you cannot go alone"). The constraints on female mobility, validated through appeals to safety, propriety, and religious custom, denotes gendered diaspora as a condition of restricted freedom.

Nusrat's position is considerably more restricted. She is constrained as a Muslim woman in Kashmir by religious rules, familial duties (she has to provide for her mother and siblings), and the assumption that she will eventually wed a "tailor" and have children. Her declaration, "I'm going to marry a tailor, that way I can carry on with my designing and support my Ummi. At least I don't have to get very involved with the man I marry, except to have children," reveals the pragmatic resignation with which she negotiates patriarchal marriage, the way she carves out minimal space for autonomy and creative work within severely constrained circumstances.

In order to enact and examine hybrid postcolonial identity, the theatrical form itself becomes an essential site. *Monsoon's* narrative strategies, the menstrual diary as documentary archive, the interweaving of monologue and dialogue, the insertion of poetic interludes, the use of music and sound design, all embody Bhabha's notion of "hybridity" of postcolonial narrative form itself. Rather than adopting a unified, coherent theatrical language, the play splinters into multiple registers: epistolary (letters to Kavita), confessional (diary entries), poetic (the refrain "The heavens have opened"), and dialogical (scenes between lovers). This formal heterogeneity mirrors the play's thematic preoccupation with hybrid, fragmented, never-quite-coherent postcolonial subjectivity. Evenmore, the play's use of sound design further adds to this subjectivity. Rather than rendering the female voice as unified and transparent, *Monsoon* employs layered sound, tabla rhythms, women's singing, the sounds of water, the monsoon itself, to create what we might call an affective architecture wherein individual subjectivity is situated within larger sonic and environmental landscapes.

IV. ECOFEMINISM, SPIRITUALITY AND THE MENSTRUAL-MONSOON CONNECTION

Maya Chowdhry's *Monsoon* interlaces themes of ecofeminism and spirituality, creating a tapestry that critiques patriarchal structures and celebrates the regenerative cycles of nature and femininity. Ecofeminism, as articulated by Vandana Shiva (*Staying Alive*, 1988) and Karen J. Warren (*Ecofeminist Philosophy*, 2000), identifies the interconnected oppression of women and nature under patriarchal systems. Shiva argues that women, particularly

in rural India, function as custodians of biodiversity and sustainable knowledge systems. Traditional practices of women farmers, water-harvesters, and forest-dwellers represent forms of ecological wisdom systematically devalued and displaced by the Green Revolution's substitution of polyculture farming with chemical-intensive monocultures.

Crucially, Shiva refuses to essentialize women's relationship to nature as rooted in biology alone. Rather, she argues that women's historical positioning as reproducers of subsistence and managers of household economies has generated specific forms of ecological knowledge and commitment. The Chipko Movement, wherein women literally embraced trees to prevent deforestation, exemplifies how women's ecological activism constitutes "a non-violent and humanly inclusive alternative to the dominant paradigm of contemporary scientific and development thought." Women's ecological resistance is rooted in material necessity, in the recognition that ecological degradation directly threatens women's survival.

Monsoon enacts this ecofeminist vision through its attention to water scarcity, seasonal precarity, and the labor involved in sustaining life under conditions of ecological instability. Massi's warning against drinking unsafe water in Chandigarh, Nusrat's family's dependence on seasonal monsoon patterns for their houseboat tourism business, the newspaper headline reporting "Floods in Bangladesh," all of these ground the play's vision in material ecological reality. The play insists that the personal and ecological, the menstrual and the meteorological, are not separate registers but expressions of the same planetary disturbance. Even menstruation is symbolically aligned with ecological cycles, positioning women's bodies as intrinsically linked to the rhythms of the environment. This connection critiques patriarchal constructions of impurity and highlights the natural, regenerative power of menstruation.

Unlike Julia Kristeva's horror-centric concept of abjection, *Monsoon* reframes menstruation as a source of renewal and empowerment. The imagery of blood flowing like monsoon rains situates menstruation within a natural cycle, reclaiming it from cultural stigmas. By intertwining the menstrual cycle with the monsoon's arrival, Chowdhry transforms a culturally stigmatized phenomenon into a symbol of resistance and regeneration. Janet Chawla's exploration of menstrual symbolism in Vedic mythology further illuminates the play's spiritual dimensions. In Vedic traditions, menstruation is emblematic of *rta*, the cosmic order, linking women's bodies with lunar rhythms and natural cycles. Chawla explains, "The word *rta* stands for both seasons and the menstrual cycle," underscoring

the intrinsic link between women's bodies and the rhythms of nature. Chowdhry mirrors this association through Jalaarnava's menstrual diary, which serves as a narrative device connecting her bodily cycles with the monsoon's arrival. This framing reclaims menstruation from patriarchal narratives that stigmatize it as impure. Instead, the play celebrates menstruation as a natural, regenerative force, aligning it with the monsoon's dual role as life-giver and disruptor. By intertwining these cycles, Chowdhry underscores the sacredness of the feminine body and its inherent link to nature. By reclaiming menstruation as sacred, *Monsoon* critiques the patriarchal commodification of both women and nature, offering a vision rooted in harmony and respect.

Water is central to *Monsoon*'s ecofeminist framework, serving as both a life-giving and disruptive force. Chawla's discussion of well-worship rituals highlights water as a yonic symbol, reflecting ancient reverence for the feminine as a source of life. She notes that "the worship of the well as yonic source of life is congruent with the early Rig Vedic waters-women-mothers cluster of imagery" (Chawla 281). The play's monsoon rains embody this duality, symbolizing both creation and destruction. Scenes such as the market's dry spring and the Youth Hostel's water scarcity emphasize ecological vulnerability, linking environmental degradation with the exploitation of women.

The monsoon's arrival mirrors the menstrual cycle's role in reproduction, with lines like, "The heavens have opened... the roads are awash, rivers cascading and overflowing," likening menstrual blood to rains that sustain life. This alignment critiques systems that devalue natural cycles, reclaiming them as sacred. Through the monsoon, Chowdhry celebrates the feminine as creator and disruptor, echoing ecofeminist calls for reevaluating humanity's relationship with nature. Hindu goddesses play a pivotal role in *Monsoon*'s spiritual narrative, embodying cyclical forces of creation and destruction. Durga and Kali, frequently referenced in the play, disrupt binaries of purity and impurity, symbolizing menstrual blood as a sacred element of renewal. Durga's association with strength and protection and Kali's with transformation and time reflect the duality of the feminine as both nurturing and fearsome. These archetypes resonate through the play's exploration of menstruation and the monsoon, emphasizing their sacred and transformative nature.

The spiritual framing extends beyond Vedic traditions, challenging patriarchal restrictions on menstruation. For example, the scene at the temple where Jalaarnava reflects on menstrual taboos critiques cultural norms that label menstrual blood as impure. Her internal monologue, "Maybe men made up the rules, cause they're jealous that

life doesn't abound from deep within the warm flesh of their womb," underscores the patriarchal fear of feminine power. Furthermore, the characters serve as microcosms of larger ecofeminist struggles. Jalaarnava's journey to embrace her body's rhythms symbolizes resistance to patriarchal constructs that stigmatize natural processes. Her menstrual diary functions as both a personal and political act, reclaiming her bodily autonomy. Similarly, Nusrat's navigation of cultural expectations critiques restrictive traditions, reflecting ecofeminist themes of agency and resistance. The characters' relationships with water further illustrate ecofeminist themes. For instance, Jalaarnava's time on the houseboat becomes a space of healing and self-discovery, where water symbolizes both connection and transformation. The intimate moments shared between Jalaarnava and Nusrat underscore the reclamation of agency within patriarchal systems, linking personal liberation with collective resistance.

V. INDIAN AESTHETIC THEORIES: RASA AND DHVANI

Monsoon employs the principles of *rasa* (aesthetic emotion) and *dhvani* (suggestion) from classical Indian aesthetics. These theories, articulated by Abhinavagupta and Anandavardhana, provide a framework for understanding the play's emotional and symbolic depth. In classical Indian aesthetics, the concept of *rasa* refers to the emotional essence that a work of art evokes in its audience. Chowdhry employs this principle to imbue *Monsoon* with a spectrum of emotional experiences. The *shringara rasa* (erotic emotion) manifests through the tender yet clandestine relationship between Jalaarnava and Nusrat. Their shared moments, marked by sensuality, intimacy, and vulnerability, evoke an appreciation of love and sensuality that transcends normative boundaries. The *karuna rasa* (pathos) is most evident in Jalaarnava's reflections on her sense of isolation and the inevitable loss that accompanies her diasporic existence. Her emotional turmoil, amplified by the transient nature of her relationship with Nusrat, invites the audience to empathize with her struggles. Through these emotional tones, the play creates a nuanced portrayal of queer female identity in a diasporic setting, where love and loss are intertwined with cultural displacement.

The concept of *dhvani*, or suggestion, allows a text to evoke meanings beyond the literal. Chowdhry masterfully uses *dhvani* to add layers of symbolic resonance to *Monsoon*. For example, the poetic line, "The flesh of Durga, fighting for change... the hungry red earth heaving and growing," is emblematic of this technique. The imagery suggests resistance and renewal, with the reference to Durga, a warrior goddess, symbolizing

feminine strength and transformation. Meanwhile, the "hungry red earth" evokes the cyclical processes of destruction and renewal, mirroring the emotional and cultural upheavals experienced by the characters. The metaphorical interplay between nature and human emotion reinforces the connection between the physical monsoon and the internal storms of the characters. The use of *dhvani* thus invites the audience to engage with the text on multiple levels, exploring themes of identity, transformation, and resilience.

Chowdhry's meticulous incorporation of sound, both instrumental and natural, heightens the emotional impact of *Monsoon*. The soundscape serves as a vital component of the play's aesthetic and thematic framework. The tabla punctuates moments of emotional intensity, with its rhythmic beats mirroring the monsoon's downpour and the characters' inner turmoil. The flute evokes the gentle flow of water, symbolizing the fluidity of emotions and the transient nature of the characters' experiences. Thunder, rain, and rustling leaves ground the narrative in its ecological setting. These sounds do more than provide a backdrop; they amplify the emotional tones of the scenes, enhancing the *rasa* experience for the audience. The interplay of sound and silence further accentuates the aesthetic depth. Silence punctuates moments of introspection or emotional climax, creating a stark contrast that heightens the impact of subsequent auditory elements.

The monsoon, a recurring motif in the play, operates as a multi-layered metaphor. The rain symbolizes nature's cycles of destruction and renewal, mirroring the broader themes of transformation and resilience. It parallels the characters' inner conflicts and emotional upheavals, symbolizing both cleansing and turmoil. The monsoon evokes a meditative quality, drawing connections to themes of impermanence and the search for belonging. Recent scholarship by Rajendran (2020) underscores the enduring relevance of *dhvani* in contemporary literature, highlighting its ability to connect modern narratives to classical traditions. In *Monsoon*, the monsoon rain exemplifies this connection, blending ecological, emotional, and spiritual dimensions into a cohesive metaphor.

VI. CONCLUSION

Maya Chowdhry's *Monsoon* is a powerful exploration of menstruation, ecology, and identity. By integrating the classical Indian aesthetic theories of *rasa* and *dhvani*, Maya Chowdhry's *Monsoon* transcends the boundaries of conventional diasporic and queer narratives. The play's emotional resonance, symbolic depth, and auditory richness create a powerful exploration of identity, love, and belonging. Through its nuanced use of these

principles, Monsoon not only revives the classical traditions of Indian aesthetics but also reimagines them within a contemporary, diasporic context, making it a deeply evocative and timeless work of art. Furthermore, by exploring the feminist, psychoanalytic, and aesthetic perspectives, the play transforms the abject into the sublime, challenging societal norms while celebrating the cycles of life. This study demonstrates how Monsoon transcends cultural and disciplinary boundaries, establishing itself as a seminal work in feminist ecological literature.

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A Study of *Love Medicine* Based on Herman's Theory

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Abstract— In her representative work *Love Medicine*, American Indian female writer Louise Erdrick uses a polyphonic narrative structure to construct a narrative space with diverse dialogues, allowing Indian characters of different identities to narrate their traumatic experiences. This paper is based on Judith Herman's theory of trauma and recovery, combined with the historical and current challenges faced by Native American reservation residents in the novel, to analyze the interweaving and composite presentation of personal trauma, war trauma, and cultural trauma in the work. Through polyphonic narrative strategy, Erdrick not only breaks the traditional linear trauma writing mode, but also transforms traumatic memories into narrative dynamics for cultural identity reconstruction. This paper further explores how the Native American characters in *Love Medicine* gradually achieve psychological and social trauma recovery by returning to cultural roots, coordinating the tension between tradition and modernity, and completing cultural redemption for individuals and ethnic groups through the three stages of trauma recovery proposed by Herman, safety establishment, mourning, and reconstruction connection.



Keywords— *Love Medicine*, Judith Herman, trauma recovery

Louise Erdrick is a highly influential Native American female writer in contemporary American literature. She is one of the representative writers of the Second Wave of the Native American Renaissance as well. Kenneth Lincoln once highly praised the literary achievements of *Love Medicine*, pointing out that its number of awards is extremely prominent in contemporary American Indian literature^[1]. *Love Medicine* consists of 18 intertextual short stories, showcasing the lives of several generations of Native American Chippewa and the legendary stories of the North Dakota family on the reservation site through unique narrative structures and rich cultural connotations. The novel depicts conflicts between Native American tribal culture and White Americans colonial culture, revealing the cultural trauma of traditional tribes, the war trauma left by the Vietnam War on conscripted Native

Americans, and the trauma faced by Chippewa individuals.

Since the 1990s, trauma research has gradually shifted from a single research framework in psychology to humanities and social sciences such as literature and history, forming a new interdisciplinary research paradigm. Judith Herman constructed a three-stage model of security review, mourning reconstruction, the sense of connection in *Trauma and Recovery*, providing a theoretical framework for analyzing literary trauma narratives. *Love Medicine* constructs a 50 year traumatic memory map of the Chippewa tribe through multiple intertextual short stories. Existing research mostly focuses on postcolonialism, feminism, and ecocriticism. This paper applies Herman's theory and combines it with the cultural context of indigenous peoples to reveal the cultural and political significance of trauma writing in the novel.

1. The complex presentation of trauma

1.1 Personal trauma: physical violence and identity rupture

Herman proposed that traumatic events cause people to doubt basic interpersonal relationships. Tearing apart the attachment relationships of family, friends, and community, destroying the belief system that gives meaning to human experience, violating the victim's belief in the laws of nature or God's will, and plunging the victim into an abyss full of survival crisis. In the novel, Joan Kashpa's biological father abandoned their mother, daughter and fled to the Twin Cities. Her mother was an alcoholic and they mostly lived in the forest. Joan was found frozen several times in outdoor toilets, ditches, and monastery stairs. After her mother passed away in the forest, Joan survived on grass and pine sap. She ate the new shoots of grass like a deer, as if she were the daughter of nature. Joan's charming appearance earned her the reputation of Miss American Indian. Despite this, Joan showed indifference towards death from a young age^[2]. Not long after she was adopted by Aunt Mary, she seduced Gaudi and Orilia into playing the game of hanging people with her. She incited them to hang her with a rope, thinking that she could end her own life, but Aunt Mary saved her at a critical moment. This not only failed to make Joan grateful, but also used dirty words to insult her aunt. Joan's childhood was a series of abuse and abandonment, which had a great impact on her life. Judith Herman believed that repeated trauma in adult life can erode the already formed personality structure, but repeated trauma in childhood can form and deform personality.

Herman emphasized that many symptoms of post-traumatic stress can be classified into three main categories: excessive alertness, memory intrusion, and confinement and timidity. Due to her Native American identity, Joan endured extreme poverty and prolonged mental torment in the city of Williston. Her frequent job changes were essentially a defensive response to the harassment and discrimination of white customers, demonstrating her long-term state of excessive vigilance.

Before being adopted by Aunt Mary, Joan's experiences of being frozen outdoors in winter, eating grass and pine sap became her lifelong psychological ghosts. As an adult, she went several days without food in

Williston due to lack of money. These experiences led her to see the Easter egg in the hands of a white man on Easter Sunday, as if seeing a lighthouse, attracting her to approach White American man^[3]. He peeled many Easter eggs, repeatedly triggering Joan's childhood memories, flashback directly causing her to fall into a state of mental confusion, and even creating the illusion of her own skin being fragile like an eggshell.

Joan's social pattern presents the characteristics of confinement and timidity. She refuses to establish deep connections with Native Americans living on the reservation. Her interactions with White Americans are only for the purpose of earning a living. Her abandonment of her son Lipsha pushes this behavior to the extreme^[4]. This emotional isolation is a typical manifestation of confinement and timidity in Herman's theory, as Joan strives to cut off all social networks to protect herself from secondary harm.

The blizzard on the day of Joan's death is both a reality and a symbol of her traumatic memories. The economic oppression, and identity denial that Joan suffered in White Americans world consumes her will to survive like a blizzard, destroying her foundation for survival. Herman advocates that perpetrators of systemic trauma often adopt strategies such as secrecy, stigmatization, and denial, pushing victims into the abyss of isolation and helplessness. Joan's death is the ultimate result of racial violence.

1.2 War trauma: historical violence and memory ghosts

In Louise Erdrick's *Love Medicine*, the traumatic process of Henry's character forms a profound intertextuality with Judith Herman's theory of trauma recovery^[5]. The chapter, through the identification of Henry's eyes by Vietnamese women, tears open the traumatic cracks in the identity of Native Americans under White Americans colonial violence system, while Henry's final self-inflicted ending confirms Herman's core assertion that structural trauma cannot be resolved through individual efforts.

Herman points out that the core characteristics of traumatic events are extremely scary, helplessness, loss of control, and the threat of destruction. Henry's trauma did not stem from a single violent event, but rather from the systematic cultural genocide of Native Americans by

White Americans colonial system. In the novel, White Americans use nose pointing to presuppose Henry and Red Tomahawk as tools for cannibalism. This symbolic use of bodily features is essentially a racist practice of reducing Native Americans to biological specimens^[6]. When Henry was sent to interrogate Vietnamese women, White Americans gave him a fictional identity as the inheritor of ancient interrogation techniques, which completely shattered Henry's self-defense system.

The identification of Vietnamese women became a key scene that triggered Henry's traumatic memory. This identification not only exposed the violent logic of White Americans scapegoating people of color for each other, but also forced Henry to face a cruel truth. The war he participated in was essentially a replay of White Americans colonial history, and he himself was just a link in the chain of historical violence. This awakening to the essence of collective violence led Henry to what Herman called a shattered sense of self, he was unable to identify with the executioner identity bestowed upon him by White Americans, nor could he return to his Native American identity as a stripped cultural subject, ultimately becoming a rootless spirit. The Vietnam War not only inflicted severe psychological trauma on Henry, but also left indelible marks on his body. The shrapnel left deep inside the body moved to the surface of the skin over time, suggesting that Henry's traumatic memories were infiltrating from the subconscious to the conscious level. The physical existence of durian shrapnel has become a tangible symbol of traumatic memory^[7]. When the security alarm sounds, it was not only the exposure of body metal, but also a public warning of soul trauma.

The fragile structure constructed by Henry with three knives and two cups is a typical dissociative defense mechanism. Herman pointed out that trauma survivors often rebuild their sense of control over their environment through repetitive actions such as compulsive behavior or symbolic rituals such as building objects. The sharpness of the knife and the fragility of the cup create tension, implying that Henry attempted to tame his inner turmoil with dangerous tools, but was unable to heal the psychological rift. Henry's construction behavior in the bar is similar to the soul bridge in Indian shamanic rituals, but his bridge leads to nothingness, implying the unreachable

nature of trauma recovery^[8]. This magical setting precisely reflects the cruel truth of Herman's theory that restoration is a lifelong process.

Henry's story reveals a cruel fact, when trauma becomes a dual imprint of body and culture, recovery is no longer a linear process, but an endless struggle. Through this role, Erdrick pushes Herman's theory from clinical psychology to a broader context of ethnic trauma. Henry's durian shrapnel is also a cultural fragment left over from the colonial history of the entire Indian nation.

1.3 Cultural trauma: language extinction and ritual disintegration

Herman's theory states that traumatic events firstly destroy an individual's sense of security, causing them to fall into a contradictory state of excessive alertness and confinement. Nicot's experience at the Flemish School is essentially a systematic detachment of cultural language and identity. The school, as a tool of white cultural hegemony, dismantled Native American languages, traditional rituals, and self-awareness through forced assimilation education. This deprivation led to Nicot's hopeful performance in the West after graduation, but he fell into a more brutal symbolization dilemma. He was forced to play the role of an Indian who was about to die in the play, a character setting that directly reflected Herman's mention of post-traumatic memory invasion: American society compressed the collective memory of Native Americans into a single symbol of death, making Nicot a living carrier of cultural trauma.

More profoundly, the plot of American women buying Nicot as a nude model for \$200 pushes cultural exploitation to the extreme. This behavior is not only the objectification of the individual's body, but also a complete denial of the dignity of Indian culture^[9]. Nicot's Jumping portrait has become a cultural fast-moving consumer under American consumerism. Herman emphasizes that trauma victims can be trapped in confinement and fear due to a shattered sense of self, which is exactly what Nicot's state is at that time. He tries to integrate into White Americans world through performance, but finds himself just a puppet of death symbols. This cognition gradually causes him to lose trust in his own cultural value.

Herman points out that the core of traumatic events is the loss of autonomy and disconnection. Lipsha's magical

touch ability was originally an important symbol of his ethnic identity, but when he attempted to use frozen turkey hearts instead of traditional black goose hearts to make love medicine, this behavior directly led to the death of his grandfather Nicot. This plot coincides with Herman's description of sustained trauma. When Lipsha discovers the absurd reality of frozen chicken hearts impersonating love drugs, he is actually experiencing a systemic failure of cultural rituals. Traditional pharmacists must communicate with the souls of their ancestors through the heart of a black goose, and the industrial nature of frozen food completely dissolves this sacredness. As Herman said, trauma destroys people's sense of security in normal life, and Lipsha's inability to touch is a physiological manifestation of the collapse of cultural security.

It is worth noting that when Lipsha was young and restless, he chose churches instead of tribal holy sites to seek peace. This contradictory behavior reveals a deeper cultural trauma. When American religion occupies the Native spiritual space, they are no longer able to obtain psychological safety through their own ethnic rituals. Herman emphasized that healing relationships are a key factor in recovery. The brief peace that Lipsha gained in the church precisely highlighted his broken connection with his own culture^[10]. He attempted to find a safe base in a heterogeneous culture, but ultimately fell deeper into identity loss.

The plot arrangement of Nicot and Lipsha profoundly reveals the paradox of cultural trauma recovery. On the one hand, individuals must repair their trauma by returning to the cultural community. On the other hand, the survival of cultural communities is itself threatened by traumatic forces. Herman's theory provides a framework for understanding this paradox, positing that restoration lies not in forgetting trauma, but in acknowledging it, mourning the loss, rebuilding connections, and ultimately achieving a reconfirmation of cultural sovereignty. This process finds its literary manifestation in Nicot's journey back home and the restoration of Lipsha's magical touch ability. The individual's struggle reflects the survival dilemma of the entire Indian culture under colonial violence, and also declares the possibility of cultural trauma recovery in a returning posture.

2. Multi-voice reconstruction strategy for trauma

narrative

2.1 Circular narrative: breaking the linear view of time

Herman profoundly points out in trauma theory that traumatic memories are not stored in the brain in the form of complete narratives, but are dispersed in neural circuits in the form of sensory fragments, including nonverbal symbols such as visual afterimages, bodily pain, and emotional flashbacks. This fragmented storage mechanism directly leads to the rupture and distortion of time perception among trauma survivors. The boundary between the past and present is blurred, dangerous situations are eternal, and safety experiences are compressed into fleeting fragments. The circular narrative structure adopted by Louise Erdrick in *Love Medicine* is precisely a literary presentation of this neurocognitive mechanism. The novel unfolds the narrative starting from the death of Joan Morrissey, and through the cross recollection of six narrators Lipsha, Mary, Lulu, Joan, Lehmann, Albertineine, breaks down the same event into sensory fragments from different perspectives, ultimately piecing together a non-linear trauma map.

More noteworthy is that the novel further reveals the subjectively reconstructive nature of traumatic memory through the cognitive differences between narrators. For example, Lipsha possesses magical touch ability. His memory focuses on the physical details of frozen turkey heart leading to grandfather's death, which reinforces his sense of guilt through embodied memory. As the guardian of traditional beliefs, Mary transforms trauma into an opportunity for intergenerational connection through the ritual memory of prayer bead transmission. This split in narrative perspective corresponds precisely to the theory of memory plasticity in neuroscience, where traumatic memory is not a fixed, unchanging neural imprint, but is reencoded every time it is recalled based on the current context and emotional state. Through the structural innovation of circular narrative, *Love Medicine* not only allows readers to intuitively feel the reshaping of cognitive structure caused by trauma, but also implies the possibility of healing^[11]. When the fragmented memories of the six narrators finally achieve some metaphorical integration in the symbolic system of *Love Medicine*, readers also experience an empathetic journey from neural dissociation to cognitive reconstruction. This may be the ultimate

intention of Erdrick as a master of trauma literature: to allow readers to prepractice the neural mechanisms of trauma recovery through narrative experiments in literary experiences.

2.2 Polyphonic dialogue: deconstructing single trauma narratives

Bakhtin's polyphonic theory achieves a creative transformation with strong local cultural characteristics in *Love Medicine*. Its core lies in deconstructing the monopoly of a single authoritative narrative on traumatic experiences through the juxtaposition and dialogue of multiple subjects. In the novel, Mary Kapshaw's pragmatic philosophy of survival, Lipshaw's identity confusion and spiritual dispersal, and Henry Martin's war memories, silent traumas together form a polyphonic, non-hierarchical narrative symphony. Each character speaks out as an independent thought subject, refusing to be included in any unified trauma interpretation framework. This narrative democratization reaches its climax in the chapter of Jumping. When Mary uses the daily ritual of peeling potatoes to confront the psychological trauma caused by her husband's infidelity, the mechanical repetition of her actions and the imagery of potato peel peeling off are both physical stripping of traumatic memories and metaphorical repair of cultural fractures.

Bakhtin emphasized the incompleteness and openness of polyphonic novels, which is transformed into a subversive practice of trauma writing in *Love Medicine*. Mary's rustling sound of blades rubbing against potatoes, industrial noise of trains roaring outside the window form a vocal counterpoint when peeling potatoes, implying the eternal struggle between traditional life rhythm and modern impact. Her action of neatly stacking the sliced potatoes into the enamel pot is similar to the concretization of the safe base in Herman's trauma recovery theory. Reconstructing a sense of control over daily life through repetitive labor, and deconstructing and reconstructing traumatic events in a cycle^[12]. This resilience in ordinariness forms a profound intertextuality with Herman's proposal to restore a sense of security through daily rituals, but the breakthrough of *Love Medicine* is that Mary's establishment of security is not a forgetting of trauma, but a stubborn adherence to cultural memory

wrapped in a pragmatic shell by transforming painful experiences into survival strategies.

The democratization of narrative in novels directly challenges the binary opposition of victim savior in mainstream trauma narratives. When Mary discovered that her husband was cheating, she didn't choose to cry or seek revenge. Instead, she digested the pain by increasing the number of mashed potatoes and making them extra delicate. This silent resistance echoes across chapters with Henry Martin's survival strategy of lifelong silence after war trauma, both refusing to be observed and interpreted as trauma objects, but redefining the meaning of trauma in a subjective manner^[13]. The clamor advocated by Bakhtin is transformed into diverse expressions of cultural trauma. Mary's pragmatism, Lipsha's spiritual exploration, and Henry Martin's silent watch, collectively constituting a negative declaration of a single trauma interpretation.

3. The recovery path of trauma: the tension between cultural tradition and modernity

3.1 The healing function of traditional rituals

Herman emphasizes in *Trauma and Recovery* that the primary condition for trauma recovery is to establish a dual sense of security at both the physical and psychological levels. Mary suffered physical torture and mental humiliation from Leopold in the monastery, which was essentially a systematic violence of American religion against the Native Indian culture. This violence led to Mary's typical post-traumatic stress response. She compared Leopold to a black fish and herself as bait, a poetic imagery suggesting her long-term fear of being preyed upon. In Mary's hallucinations, scenes of Leopold's visceral transformation into dust repeatedly appear. Dust is a concrete representation of traumatic memories. It is also a metaphor for the dust to dust view of life and death in Native Indian culture. Mary once attempted to numb her pain by self deprecatingly cutting off a shroud, but ultimately awakened in the Scar incident forged by Leopold.

Mary achieved the reconstruction of a sense of security by actively restructuring the narrative. When the nuns misinterpreted her scars as divine marks, she realized that it was Leopold's lie of exoneration, thus denying the Christian narrative's right to interpret her own trauma. She fantasized about her saint statue being made of pure gold,

with lips set in rubies and toes made of pink shells, which symbolize female fertility in Native American culture. This imagery blended Christian saint symbols with local religious elements, declaring the inalienable nature of its cultural subject. Mary ultimately escaped from the monastery, symbolizing a complete rejection of the oppressive environment. Herman points out that detachment from the source of trauma is a prerequisite for recovery, and Mary's actions confirm this.

The plot of Mary relying on Indian talismans during each delivery perfectly fits Herman's proposed restoration mechanism of reconstructing self narrative through cultural practice. Childbirth, as the most vulnerable moment in a woman's life, was endowed with sacredness in Indian culture. Talismans were passed down by ancient Native American families, implying intergenerational transmission and healing of cultural trauma^[14]. When Rush Bell condemned her son's disregard for Mary's childbirth, she was not only defending her daughter-in-law's rights, but also reaffirming the values of female fertility is sacred and inviolable in Indian culture. Mary gave birth smoothly under the protection of a talisman. This successful experience helped her regain a sense of control over her body. Herman emphasized that trauma can destroy an individual's self-efficacy beliefs, and cultural rituals helped survivors rebuild their control over life by providing replicable success templates.

Mary achieved psychological decolonization in the monastery by rejecting Christian narratives, and achieved bodily autonomy during childbirth through talismans^[15], both of which together constitute her transformation from a traumatic object to an active subject. Indian talismans, as a living tradition, were in stark contrast to Christian death violence. When Mary incorporated seashells into the saint's imagination, she was actually creating a mixed cultural identity that acknowledges traumatic history and achieved transcendence through cultural innovation. Mary eventually became a defender of tradition, forming an alliance with Lulu Nanapush to fight against White Americans factory project, marking the upgrade of her recovery process from individual healing to collective action^[16]. Herman points out that the highest stage of recovery for trauma survivors is self redemption through helping others, and Mary's transformation is a literary

reflection of this theory.

3.2 The Individual's Negotiation in Modern Context: Between Isolation and Reconnection

Judith Herman's theory posits that trauma recovery fundamentally occurs within a relational context, requiring the survivor to rebuild connections to self and community. This section explores how the characters in *Love Medicine*, while often situated within a fragmented modern landscape of geographical displacement, urban migration, and fractured kinship, engage in a profound negotiation between modern individual existence and the imperative for communal healing. Their journeys manifest not as a simple return to tradition, but as fraught, creative attempts to forge new pathways to reconnection.

The modern context in the novel often amplifies trauma through isolation and dislocation. Characters like Albertineine Johnson, who leaves the reservation for nursing school and city life, embody this tension. Her healing cannot solely rely on communal rituals back home. Instead, she navigates a hybrid space. Her medical training represents a modern system of knowledge, yet her empathetic care for the dying, a form of witnessing and providing comfort, can be read as an individualized, modern analogue to traditional acts of community stewardship. Similarly, Lipsha Morrissey's journey from his failed, misunderstood use of touch to his eventual search for identity and purpose, illustrates an individual grappling with inherited spiritual roles in a world that no longer universally believes in them. His ultimate path suggests that the reconfirmation of cultural sovereignty may involve personal quests and the adaptation of traditional purposes to contemporary, personal circumstances.

Louise Erdrich critically examines the role of modern institutions as often being sources of trauma rather than healing. However, healing attempts also engage with the materials and landscapes of modernity. For instance, the car in *The Red Convertible* becomes a complex, modern symbol. It is a site of brotherly bonding but also the mechanical object associated with Henry Lamartine Jr.'s war trauma and eventual death. Characters use modern tools, cars, letters, urban jobs, to navigate their relationships and traumas, with ambiguous outcomes^[17]. This reflects Herman's observation that recovery is not a

linear triumph but a process fraught with setbacks, where the modern world presents both new forms of alienation and potential, albeit fragile, new avenues for agency and reconnection.

The recovery path, in its tension between tradition and modernity, culminates in the struggle to synthesize a coherent self from fragmented identities. This is central to the novel's structure of multi-voiced narratives. A character like Lulu Lamartine, who defiantly navigates personal relationships, political battles over land, and her deep, unwavering connection to traditional ways, embodies this synthesis. Her strength stems not from rejecting one for the other, but from a pragmatic and fierce integration of personal desire, political savvy, and cultural memory. Her resilience illustrates Herman's final stage of recovery: the survivor's ability to reengage with life with a renewed sense of purpose and meaning, even if that purpose is forged from the very conflicts between the old and the new. Therefore, the title may be reinterpreted not only as a specific traditional charm but as the ongoing, courageous attempt to create bonds of care, understanding, and survival across the ruptures of history and modernity.

4. Conclusion

As a highly representative literary masterpiece of Louise Erdrick, *Love Medicine* constructs a multidimensional and profound critical discourse system through its unique traumatic narrative technique, successfully completing a profound critique of the triple political level of American society. Firstly, the novel uses delicate and realistic strokes to launch a tearful accusation against the long-standing racial policies implemented by the US government. By depicting the physical and mental trauma suffered by Native Americans under policies such as racial discrimination, land grabbing, and cultural assimilation, the brutality and injustice of the US government's racial policies are blatantly presented to readers, making people deeply aware of the devastating impact these policies have brought to Native American communities. Secondly, the work boldly deconstructs cultural hegemony in depth. Under the wave of globalization, mainstream culture continues to erode the living space of peripheral cultures with its powerful influence. However, *Love Medicine* reveals the power manipulation and cultural violence behind cultural

hegemony by showcasing the unique charm, resilience, and struggle of indigenous culture under the pressure of cultural hegemony, breaking the narrative mode of mainstream culture's singularity and hegemony, sounding the alarm for the coexistence and prosperity of diverse cultures. Thirdly, the novel actively explores the survival strategies of indigenous cultures in the context of globalization. In the context of irreversible globalization, indigenous culture is facing unprecedented challenges and opportunities. The protagonists in *Love Medicine* constantly explore and try in trauma and difficulties, and in various ways, uphold and inherit their own ethnic culture, finding new survival paths and development possibilities for indigenous culture in the wave of globalization.

Erdrick demonstrated innovative spirit in literary creation, skillfully transforming the psychological mechanisms in Herman's theory into literary form experiments with her unique insight. Herman's theory deeply analyzes the impact of trauma on individual psychology and the process of trauma repair, while Erdrick integrates these profound insights from psychological perspectives into the narrative structure, character development, and plot setting of the novel. Through non-linear narrative time, fragmented narrative structures, and inner monologues, she vividly reproduces the distortion and reshaping of indigenous individuals' psychology caused by traumatic experiences, making trauma writing no longer just a simple record of painful experiences, but a carrier with strong cultural resistance. This writing strategy is like a sharp surgical knife, accurately analyzing various ills in American society, while also injecting new vitality and connotation into Native American literature. It greatly expands the expressive dimensions of North American indigenous literature, moving it from a single ethnic narrative to a broader field of social criticism. It also provides a valuable cross-cultural template for postcolonial trauma research. Postcolonial trauma research is dedicated to exploring the trauma and cultural impact suffered by oppressed nations under colonial rule. *Love Medicine* provides rich cases and theoretical insights for this research field with its unique perspective and profound connotation, promoting the continuous development of postcolonial trauma research in

cross-cultural contexts.

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Enhancing Reading Skills Through Peer Tutoring Strategy

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Abstract— This study utilized the Peer Tutoring Strategy to enhance the reading skills of Grade 7 students who were identified as struggling readers. The intervention focused on addressing common reading miscues, such as mispronunciation, omission, substitution, and insertion, which often hinder comprehension and fluency. Through structured peer tutoring sessions, learners engaged in collaborative reading activities where higher-performing students guided their peers in decoding, pronunciation, and comprehension tasks. Findings revealed that peer tutoring significantly reduced the frequency of miscues and fostered greater confidence, active participation, and engagement among learners. The study highlights that peer tutoring is an effective, low-cost, and sustainable approach to improving reading skills, particularly for struggling readers in the classroom setting. Moreover, the post-intervention results indicated a noticeable decrease in specific reading miscues, particularly in mispronunciation, omission, substitution, and insertion errors. The structured peer tutoring activities allowed learners to receive immediate corrective feedback, which strengthened their word recognition and decoding skills. These findings affirm that targeted peer tutoring interventions are effective in addressing persistent reading miscues among struggling readers. It is recommended that schools integrate structured peer tutoring programs into their reading enhancement initiatives to support struggling readers and promote a culture of shared responsibility in literacy development.



Keywords— collaborative learning, peer tutoring, reading comprehension, reading miscues, reading skills

I. INTRODUCTION

Reading difficulties are commonly observed among early and struggling readers. Cruz and Javier (2018) found that Filipino learners, especially in public schools, frequently mispronounced words in both English and Filipino due to a lack of structured phonics instruction. Santiago and Bañez (2018) also found that mispronunciations among Filipino students were largely due to limited phonemic awareness and insufficient reading exposure, especially in English. Castles, Rastle, and Nation (2018) highlight that these types of miscues are often a consequence of inadequate phonics instruction during early reading development.

Omission errors, where a reader skips letters or entire words, are another significant issue. The Philippine Research Journal (Perez, 2019) reported that many

elementary pupils omit words when reading aloud, which compromises comprehension. Domingo and Velasco (2021) reported that these errors are common among Filipino bilingual students who rely heavily on context clues to compensate for limited decoding skills. Similarly, Zhou et al. (2019) identified omission and insertion issues in international learners as symptoms of poor visual processing.

Substitution and insertion errors are also prevalent in struggling readers. These errors are often linked to limited vocabulary and weak word recognition. In a study by Santiago and Bartolome (2020) on Filipino students, substitution and insertion were among the most common decoding errors. Repetition, or the unnecessary repeating of words or phrases, often results from a lack of confidence or poor fluency. International studies, such as

those by the National Reading Panel (2000), noted that children who are not fluent often reread words or phrases out of hesitation. In the Philippines repetition has been observed frequently among students learning English as a second language, as documented by Medina and Dela Cruz (2021).

One major cause of poor reading performance is the lack of continuity in reading instruction. Many students receive intensive reading instruction in early grades but little structured support beyond Grade 3. This "instructional gap" often leads to stagnation in reading growth, particularly among low-achieving students (Kim et al., 2017).

Another persistent problem is the lack of individualized and sustained intervention. Many programs are time-limited and generalized, failing to address the specific types of miscues that different students exhibit. Domingo and Velasco (2021) highlighted that Filipino students often make reading errors due to a mismatch between their language background and the instructional language. This situation is mirrored internationally, where students from diverse linguistic backgrounds are placed in one-size-fits-all interventions that do not consider cultural or language diversity (Gay, 2018).

To address these reading difficulties, both national and international studies advocate evidence-based interventions. Programs like Reading Remediation and Enrichment have been implemented to offer targeted instruction to struggling readers (Garcia & Reyes, 2020). Recent initiatives by DepEd and partner NGOs have emphasized the importance of diagnostic reading assessments and individualized reading interventions (Cruz & Santos, 2021). Internationally, the use of structured literacy programs such as the Orton-Gillingham approach and Reading Recovery has shown significant improvements in decoding, fluency, and comprehension (Henry & Flynn, 2020). These programs combine phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension, and are delivered through systematic, explicit instruction tailored to the learner's specific needs. Although structured literacy interventions have shown measurable improvements in phonological awareness and word decoding, they have not completely addressed the root causes of reading miscues such as substitution, omission, or mispronunciation. For instance, students may improve in word recognition but still struggle with fluency and comprehension, which can perpetuate miscues when reading aloud. According to Castles, Rastle, and Nation (2018), while phonics instruction is essential, it must be combined with vocabulary development and contextual reading strategies to reduce errors like substitution and mispronunciation meaningfully.

Despite years of implementing various interventions—such as phonics-based instruction, structured literacy programs, and teacher-led remediation—problems related to reading miscues (e.g., mispronunciation, substitution, omission, and reversal) persist among many learners. While these approaches improve decoding and fluency for some, they are not always responsive to individual student needs, especially those who require more frequent and personalized feedback. Santiago and Bañez (2018) observed that many Grade 7 students in the Philippines continued to exhibit miscues even after intervention, suggesting that the current methods, though well-intentioned, may be insufficient in fully addressing the depth and variety of reading difficulties. Therefore, while some progress has been made, a more comprehensive literacy approach is needed.

One emerging strategy that could offer a promising solution is peer tutoring, where more proficient students assist struggling peers under guided supervision. Peer tutoring has been shown to be particularly effective in reinforcing reading skills, reducing miscues, and promoting engagement through social interaction. Topping, Buchs, Duran, and Van Keer (2017) highlight that peer-assisted learning enables more frequent opportunities for reading practice and immediate correction of errors, which are critical for students who need more time to master reading fluency and accuracy. Unlike traditional classroom settings, peer tutoring creates a low-stress, collaborative environment where learners are more likely to take risks and learn from mistakes.

Peer tutoring stands out as one of the best interventions for addressing persistent issues in reading miscues including mispronunciation, omission, substitution, insertion, and other decoding errors—because of its flexibility, cost-effectiveness, and strong evidence base (Topping, Duran, & Van Keer, 2017). It directly tackles two core challenges in literacy development: the need for increased practice and the demand for immediate, personalized feedback (Wright & Cleary, 2018). Unlike one-size-fits-all interventions, peer tutoring creates a dynamic, interactive environment that supports active engagement, repetition, and correction, all of which are essential in reducing reading errors (Van Keer & Verhaeghe, 2016; Serrano & Fabella, 2019). Both tutors and tutees benefit from these interactions. Tutors improve their own reading fluency and comprehension through teaching, while tutees gain insights into decoding strategies and linguistic patterns. This study aligns closely with SDG 4: Quality Education, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. By focusing on improving reading skills and

minimizing reading difficulties such as mispronunciation, omission, substitution, and other miscues with peer tutoring as an inclusive and learner-centered intervention, this study promotes equitable learning opportunities, especially for students who are struggling and may not receive adequate individual support in traditional classroom settings (Serrano & Fabella, 2019). Thus, targeting reading miscues such as mispronunciation, omission, substitution, and insertion directly contributes to developing more competent and confident learners, thereby enhancing educational quality at the classroom level.

II. READINGS

This study assumed that PTS (Peer Tutoring Strategy) was effective in improving the reading skills or ability of the struggling readings who were taking remedial classes. This assumption was supported by the following theories: Socio-cultural Theory by Lev Vygotsky, Social Learning Theory by Bandura and Cognitive Load Theory of Sweller.

Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural theory emphasized the fundamental role of social interaction in learning. According to Vygotsky, students learn more effectively when they engage with peers in meaningful discussions and scaffolded learning experiences. A key concept in this theory is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which refers to the range of tasks that a learner can perform with the guidance of a more knowledgeable individual but cannot yet accomplish independently. Peer tutoring aligns with this framework, as the tutor (a more skilled peer) helps the tutee (a struggling reader) by providing support, modeling effective reading strategies, and gradually transferring responsibility as the tutee gains competence. Peer tutoring creates a supportive and collaborative learning environment within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The tutor acts as a scaffold, providing assistance and guidance to the tutee as they navigate challenging reading tasks. This collaborative process allows the tutee to achieve higher levels of cognitive growth and skill development than they could achieve independently (Vygotsky, 1978). The tutor supports the tutee in recognizing and correcting reading miscues such as mispronunciation, omission, and substitution by offering immediate feedback, repetition, and encouragement, which gradually leads to reading fluency and accuracy.

Robison (2022) conducted an experimental study to assess the impact of peer tutoring on the reading comprehension of Grade 10 learners in the Philippines. The study utilized pre-test and post-test assessments to

measure improvements in reading skills. The results indicated that students who participated in peer tutoring sessions showed significant gains in reading comprehension compared to those who did not. This suggests that peer tutoring can be an effective strategy for enhancing reading skills among secondary school students. The study also highlighted the importance of structured peer tutoring programs in improving reading outcomes. By pairing students with peers who could provide guidance and support, learners were able to engage in collaborative learning experiences that reinforced their reading skills. This aligns with the principles of socio-cultural theory, which emphasizes the role of social interaction in cognitive development.

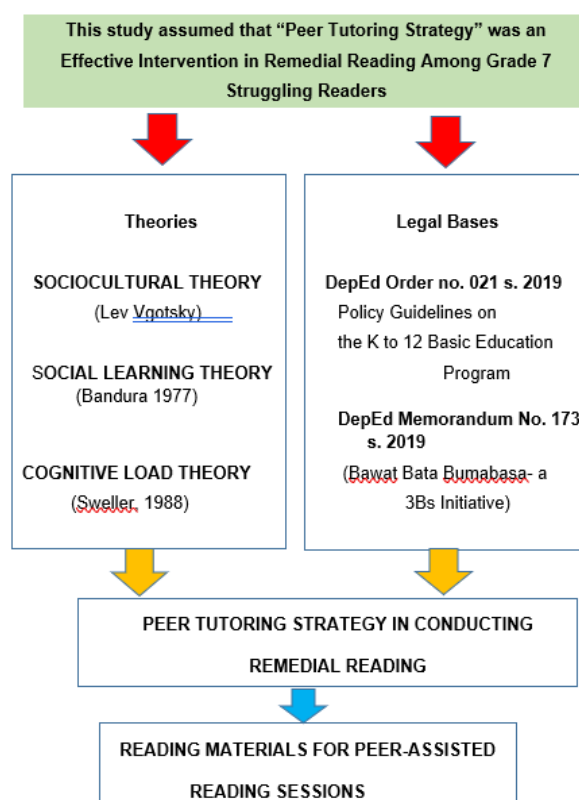


Figure 1. schematic diagram of the theoretical - conceptual framework of the study

According to Okilwa and Shelby (2016), structured peer tutoring programs have demonstrated significant improvements in reading fluency, comprehension, and motivation among at-risk students. These improvements are often attributed to the interactive and personalized nature of peer learning, which provides scaffolding in line with Vygotsky's principles. In remedial reading, peer tutoring provides struggling readers with access to a supportive, collaborative environment where they receive real-time assistance from more proficient peers. This guided interaction allows learners to reduce reading miscues such as mispronunciation, omission, substitution, and repetition by engaging in meaningful dialogue, shared

reading experiences, and immediate corrective feedback (Van Keer & Verhaeghe, 2016; Serrano & Fabella, 2019; Wright & Cleary, 2018).

Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (SLT) emphasized that learning occurs through observation, imitation, and modeling within a social context. According to Bandura, individuals, especially children, learn new behaviors and skills by watching others perform them, particularly if those behaviors are reinforced (Bandura, 1977). This theory is especially relevant to reading interventions, where learners with reading difficulties can benefit from observing reading behaviors demonstrated by peers.

Rosas and Ranier (2019) observed that students improved their oral reading fluency and comprehension after participating in structured peer tutoring sessions. These gains were attributed to repeated exposure to fluent reading behaviors, immediate corrective feedback, and positive reinforcement from peers. Similarly, Calderon, Bernardo, and Reyes (2020) noted that peer tutors naturally exhibit behaviors that serve as social models for struggling readers, and that students often mirror their peers' intonation, decoding, and even metacognitive strategies during reading sessions. This process results in increased confidence and competence among learners who were previously prone to miscues like mispronunciation, omission, and substitution.

Sanches-Ferreira et al. (2022) investigated the effects of an online peer tutoring intervention on the reading skills of elementary students, focusing on fluency and accuracy. The study found that students who participated in the online peer tutoring sessions showed significant improvements in both reading fluency and accuracy compared to those who did not. This suggests that online peer tutoring can be an effective method for enhancing reading skills in young learners.

Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory contributed further to the theoretical foundation of peer tutoring by highlighting the significance of observational learning and peer modeling. In literacy settings, students emulate proficient readers, gaining skills through imitation, feedback, and social reinforcement (Schunk, 2016). Contemporary research supports the idea that peer modeling is particularly effective in improving reading fluency and motivation among struggling readers. For instance, Vallerand and Verner-Filion (2020) found that peer relationships and supportive learning environments increase students' intrinsic motivation to read, which in turn enhances performance.

Cognitive Load Theory (CLT), developed by John Sweller, supports that effective instruction should manage

the cognitive load, the amount of mental effort required to process information, to optimize learning outcomes. CLT categorizes cognitive load into three types: intrinsic load (the inherent difficulty of the content), extraneous load (the way information is presented), and germane load (the mental effort directed toward learning). In the context of remedial reading, peer tutoring can be an effective strategy to manage these cognitive loads.

Peer tutoring reduced intrinsic cognitive load by breaking down complex reading tasks into smaller, manageable steps, allowing struggling readers to process information more effectively. By providing immediate feedback and tailored support, peer tutors helped minimize extraneous cognitive load, ensuring that instructional materials are presented. Furthermore, the interactive nature of peer tutoring promotes germane cognitive load by encouraging learners to engage actively with the material, facilitating deeper understanding.

Research showed that peer tutoring helped students handle mental effort more effectively. Duran and Topping (2017) found that peer tutoring not only improves academic performance but also supports how students think and learn by matching teaching methods to how their minds naturally work. Similarly, Paas and Sweller (2016) emphasized the importance of instructional designs that consider cognitive load principles to improve learning efficiency. Cognitive Load Theory suggested that learning was optimized when instructional methods reduced unnecessary cognitive burden, a benefit peer tutoring provides through personalized pacing and immediate feedback (Sweller, Ayres, & Kalyuga, 2019).

Canoy and Loquias (2022) examined the relationship between reading miscues and reading performance among students undergoing an oral reading verification test in English. The study identified common reading miscues, such as omissions, substitutions, and mispronunciations, and analyzed their impact on overall reading performance. The findings indicated that students who made fewer miscues tended to have better reading comprehension and fluency.

The study also highlighted the importance of addressing reading miscues in the development of effective reading programs. By identifying and analyzing these errors, educators can tailor interventions to target specific areas of difficulty, thereby improving students' reading skills. The authors recommended incorporating strategies to minimize reading miscues, such as focused practice on pronunciation and comprehension, into intensive reading programs.

Chu et al. (2017) explored the effects of an online formative peer-tutoring approach on students' learning behaviors, performance, and cognitive load in

mathematics, although the findings have implications for reading instruction as well. The study found that peer tutoring, especially in an online format, significantly reduced students' cognitive load while enhancing their problem-solving skills. Peer tutors guided their peers through challenging tasks, providing explanations and strategies that helped manage the cognitive demands of learning. The study highlighted that the collaborative nature of online peer tutoring allowed students to ask questions and receive instant feedback, which reduced confusion and enhanced learning outcomes. These findings reinforced the idea that peer tutoring was an effective strategy for enhancing reading comprehension by managing cognitive load and promoting active engagement

The theoretical framework supporting Peer Tutoring Strategy emphasized active, student-centered learning and engagement. The combination of Socio-Cultural Theory, Social Learning Theory, and Cognitive Load Theory created a rich learning environment and provided a strong foundation for peer tutoring as a remedial reading intervention. Socio-Cultural Theory emphasized learning through social interaction and scaffolding, enabling struggling readers to improve skills like decoding and fluency within their Zone of Proximal Development. Social Learning Theory highlighted the power of observation and modeling, allowing tutees to adopt effective reading strategies demonstrated by their peers, which helped reduce miscues such as mispronunciations or omissions. Meanwhile, Cognitive Load Theory supported peer tutoring by promoting simplified, learner-paced instruction that reduced mental effort, making it easier for students to focus on core reading skills and correct errors in real time. Together, these theories explained how peer tutoring enhanced reading skills in a student-centered, supportive environment.

In line with DepEd Memorandum No. 173, s. 2019, "Hamon: Bawat Bata Bumabasa," a 3B's initiative which aims to make every learner a proficient reader, and in support of the implementation of the K-12 Basic Education Program, the Department of Education (DepEd) is continuously fulfilling its mandate to produce productive and responsible citizens equipped with essential competencies and skills for lifelong learning. To make every learner a proficient reader, schools across the country are tasked to help learners develop their reading skills. However, such initiatives are still not enough based on the recent results of national assessments for student learning.

By promoting individualized support through peer-assisted learning, the study upheld the policy guidelines on the K to 12 Basic Education Curriculum with emphasis on foundational literacy, collaborative learning, and equity in

education, ensuring that no learner is left behind in achieving the basic reading skills. Peer tutoring, as a form of peer-assisted learning, directly supported these objectives by providing personalized attention to learners, particularly those who may be struggling with reading. This approach fostered an inclusive learning environment where students received the necessary scaffolding to achieve basic reading skills at their own pace, with support from their peers.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a quasi-experimental design using a pre-test and post-test approach to evaluate the effectiveness of peer tutoring as an intervention for conducting remedial reading among struggling Grade 7 students at Tugbongan National High School. This design was appropriate as it allows the comparison of student performance before and after the implementation of the intervention, providing insight into the effectiveness of the peer tutoring strategy. To assess students' performance and feedback, a survey questionnaire was administered.

The flow of the study on Fig. 2 shows the Input-Process-Output (IPO) model used to structure the study. The study began by assessing the input variables, which included the level of the respondents' pre-test performance in reading, the level of respondents' post-test performance in reading, the significant difference between pre-test and post-test results, and the students' perceptions regarding the use of the Peer Tutoring Strategy. These inputs served as the foundational data to evaluate how intervention influences reading performance and how students perceived peer-assisted learning methods.

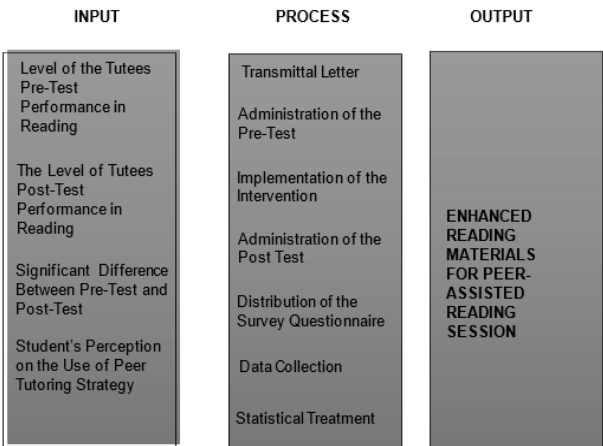


Figure 2. flow of the study

The process involved a series of systematic steps to gather and analyze the data. It started with the preparation and dissemination of a transmittal letter. The researcher then administered the pre-test respectively, to measure

baseline reading performance of the respondents particularly in the following miscues: (mispronunciation, omission, substitution, insertion, repetition, transposition, and reversal). Next, the intervention, which focuses on peer-assisted reading strategies, was implemented to enhance the reading skills. After the intervention, a post-test was conducted to measure any changes in reading performance.

Additionally, a survey questionnaire was distributed to capture students' perceptions of the peer tutoring approach with regards to perceived benefits, perceived effectiveness, and challenges encountered by the respondents during the conduct of the intervention. The collected data underwent statistical treatment to identify significant differences between the pre-test and post-test results and to analyze the respondents' feedback on the peer tutoring strategy.

The study was concentrated on a single research group that underwent both pre-test and post-test using the same instrument. This group was composed of thirty-eight (38) Grade 7 students, with twenty (20) males and eighteen (18) females and went through an individualized reading assessment (pre-test), focusing on addressing the first statement of the problem. The data collected established a baseline for evaluating the effectiveness of the intervention contributed to the statistical analysis required to determine any significant differences in reading performance. The same group received remedial reading instruction using the Peer Tutoring Strategy, which aimed to enhance their reading skills through peer-led support and was also provided with post-test which directly addressed the second statement of the problem. Data from their post-test performance were compared to their pre-test results to determine whether there was a significant difference, addressing the third statement of the problem. Additionally, the group contributed insights into the fourth statement of the problem by sharing their perceptions of the Peer Tutoring Strategy, particularly in terms of its perceived benefits, effectiveness, and the challenges they encountered using the Peer Tutoring Strategy.

Table 1

Frequency Distribution of Respondents

Grade 7	Frequency	Percentage
Male	20	52.63
Female	18	47.37
Total	38	100

The study utilized two research instruments. The first was a pre- and post-test, adopted and modified from the DepEd PHIL-IRI Assessment Tool. This instrument assessed the respondents' word reading scores by identifying specific miscues, including mispronunciation, omission, substitution, insertion, repetition, transposition,

and reversal. The results of this assessment determined the students' oral reading levels, categorizing them as frustrated, instructional, or independent readers. The next instrument employed was a survey questionnaire adapted and modified from existing tools related to peer tutoring and reading interventions. It was designed to assess the respondents' perceptions of the Peer Tutoring Strategy. The instrument underwent content validation by experts to ensure its relevance, clarity, and reliability. The questionnaire consisted of three main sections: perceived benefits, perceived effectiveness, and challenges in peer tutoring. A five-point Likert scale was utilized to measure the respondents' level of agreement allowing for a comprehensive analysis of the students' attitudes and experiences toward the strategy.

The data-gathering process began with a formal communication letter submitted to the School Head of Tugbongan National High School, Tugbongan, Consolacion, Cebu, requesting permission to conduct the study. Upon securing the necessary approval, the pre-test was administered to the participants. This test was an individualized assessment designed to evaluate the respondents' oral reading levels. During the reading assessment, the teacher recorded each participant's oral reading performance to identify and analyze reading miscues. To enhance the reliability and validity of the data collected, two additional reading teachers were engaged as inter-raters. These teachers independently assessed and rated the students' oral reading skills using the recorded performances.

For the statistical treatment of data, descriptive and inferential statistical methods were employed. Frequency and percentage distribution were used to present the students' reading levels in the pre-test and post-test, categorizing them as frustrated, instructional, or independent readers. The mean and standard deviation were computed to describe the central tendency and variability of the pre-test and post-test scores. To determine whether there was a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores, a paired sample t-test was conducted. This statistical test was appropriate for comparing two related samples and assessed the effectiveness of the Peer Tutoring Strategy. The statistical analysis provided insights into the impact of the intervention and the students' attitudes toward it, thereby addressing the study's research questions comprehensively.

To evaluate the respondents' performance level in the reading test, the following scoring procedure was utilized.

Table 2
Oral Reading Profile

Oral Reading Level	Word Reading Score (in %)
Independent	97-100 %
Instructional	90-96 %
Frustration	89% and below

The pre-test results were collected and analyzed to classify students into three categories: independent, instructional, or frustrated readers. After gathering the pre-test scores, the Peer Tutoring Strategy was implemented to enhance their reading skills. Each participant was provided with a schedule for the intervention, and the sessions were conducted from 1:00 to 2:00 in the afternoon after their regular classes. Upon completion of the intervention period, the post-test was administered to assess changes in the students' reading performance. The post-test data were collected and compared with the pre-test results to determine whether there was a significant difference in reading levels. The use of multiple raters enabled data triangulation, thereby enhancing the credibility of the study's findings.

Additionally, a survey questionnaire was distributed to gather insights into the students' perceptions of the Peer Tutoring Strategy in terms of perceived benefits, perceived effectiveness, and challenges encountered. Once all data had been gathered, they were statistically processed to evaluate the effectiveness of the Peer Tutoring Strategy. This research also adopted a five-point Likert scale to gather information on the students' perceptions of the use of the Peer Tutoring Strategy, which was interpreted using the scoring procedure as indicated.

Table 3
Students' Perception on the Use of Peer Tutoring Strategy

Scale	Range	Descriptive Equivalent	Verbal Description
5	4.21-5.00	Strongly Agree	The student completely agrees on the use of Peer Tutoring Strategy.
4	3.41- 4.20	Agree	The student somewhat agrees on the use of Peer Tutoring Strategy.
3	2.61-3.40	Neutral	The student neither agrees nor disagrees on the use of Peer Tutoring Strategy.
2	1.81- 2.60	Disagree	The student somewhat disagrees with the use of Peer Tutoring Strategy.
1	1.00- 1.80	Strongly Disagree	The student completely disagrees with Peer Tutoring Strategy.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Before implementing the Peer Tutoring Strategy, it was necessary to determine the initial reading performance of the students through a pre-test. Establishing their baseline

performance provides a clear picture of their existing strengths and weaknesses in reading, which serves as a foundation for measuring the effectiveness of the intervention. Recent research highlights the essential role of pre-assessment in identifying learners' current reading levels and instructional needs, enabling educators to design targeted tutoring interventions. For example, Frontiers (2022) conducted an online peer tutoring study that incorporated pre-, intermediate-, and post-test assessments of reading fluency and accuracy, demonstrating how such staging can be used effectively to tailor instruction and track progress. By analyzing the pre-test results, this study similarly classified learners into frustration, instructional, and independent reading levels—offering valuable insights into their reading proficiency prior to the peer tutoring sessions.

Table 4
The Performance Level of the Tutees in Reading Skills Prior to the Implementation of the Peer Tutoring Intervention

Performance Level	Frequency	Percentage
FRUSTRATION	12.00	31.58
INSTRUCTIONAL	26.00	68.42
INDEPENDENT	0.00	0.00
Total	38.00	100.00
Average	90.62	Instructional

Legend: 0-89 Frustration; 90-96 Instructional; 97-100 Independent

Before the implementation of the peer tutoring strategy, most students were at the Instructional level (68.42%), while a considerable number were at the Frustration level (31.58%). No student reached the independent level. The average performance score was 90.62, which falls under the Instructional level. This suggests that while some students had basic reading ability, they still required teacher guidance and support, and many struggled significantly. The pre-test results further reveal that the students' miscues reflect underlying gaps in word recognition, phonemic awareness, and fluency. Mispronunciations such as "said" to "sid" and "live" to "layb" indicate challenges in applying correct phonetic rules and sight word recognition, which are essential for reading accuracy. Similarly, the omission of words like "now" read as "no," and the confusion between "lived" and "live," show that some learners tend to skip or alter words that they find difficult, which interrupts the meaning of the text. Repetition miscues involving common function words like *is*, *a*, *the*, *she*, *maybe*, *but*, and *her* also suggest hesitancy and lack of confidence in decoding, often resulting from limited vocabulary exposure and insufficient fluency practice. These patterns imply that the students are still developing automaticity in word recognition, which significantly affects comprehension and overall reading performance. The pre-test results confirm that prior to the intervention, students had not yet achieved

mastery in foundational reading skills, leaving them vulnerable to frustration when faced with unfamiliar texts.

After the implementation of the Peer Tutoring Strategy, a post-test was conducted to evaluate the progress and improvement of the students' reading skills. Post-assessment serves as a vital measure to determine the effectiveness of an intervention by comparing learners' achievements against their baseline performance. In this study, the post-test results reveal the extent to which peer tutoring contributed to enhancing the reading proficiency of the tutees, specifically in moving them from lower levels of performance toward independence in reading.

The students' performance significantly improved. A majority (63.16%) reached the *Independent level*, while the rest (36.84%) were at the *Instructional level*. Notably, no student remained at the *Frustration level*. The mean score increased to 96.11, reflecting an overall shift toward independent reading ability. Table 5 illustrates the data.

Table 5

The Performance Level of the Tutees in Reading Skills After the Implementation of The Peer Tutoring Intervention

Performance Level	Frequency	Percentage
FRUSTRATION	0.00	0.00
INSTRUCTIONAL	14.00	36.84
INDEPENDENT	24.00	63.16
Total	38.00	100.00
Average	96.11	Instructional

Legend: 0-89 Frustration; 90-96 Instructional; 97-100 Independent

These findings align with current evidence that peer tutoring effectively enhances reading skills. For example, Hasnani and Ismail (2020) reported the mean reading score increased from 23.1 (cycle one) to 73.1 (cycle two) when using Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) in a high school context UIN Alauddin Makassar Journal. Flores Coll (2015) also emphasized that peer tutoring is an effective approach to improving reading skills in educational settings.

The post-test results indicate that while students demonstrated notable improvement in their reading performance, certain miscues persisted, underscoring areas that still require targeted intervention. Mispronunciations such as reading *ate* as the Filipino word "ate," *house* as "hose," or *while* as "whale" reveal ongoing struggles with distinguishing visually similar or phonetically related words. These errors suggest that although learners gained fluency, they continue to face challenges in orthographic and phonological processing, which are critical for accurate word recognition (Ehri, 2020).

Omission errors, such as reducing *decided* to *decide* or *cannot* into *can't*, imply that some students simplify words to align with their comfort level. This pattern indicates a reliance on partial decoding strategies rather than full word

recognition, which can hinder comprehension in more complex texts. Similarly, substitution errors (e.g., "was" into "has") and transposition errors (e.g., "tried" into "tired") highlight difficulties with verb tense recognition and word structure, reflecting that students still need support in morphological awareness—a skill closely tied to reading fluency and comprehension (Kuo & Anderson, 2021).

Repetition of high-frequency words such as *with*, *the*, *I*, and *they* suggests hesitancy and a lack of confidence in decoding or retrieving the next word. Such miscues are often associated with developing readers who are not yet fully automatic in word recognition, requiring greater exposure and practice to transition from controlled decoding to effortless, fluent reading (Rasinski, 2017).

Together, these findings show that peer tutoring was effective in reducing many reading difficulties and building fluency, but it was not sufficient to eliminate all miscues. The persistence of errors indicates that continuous and complementary interventions such as focused vocabulary instruction, guided oral reading, and phonics reinforcement are still necessary. These findings show that while peer tutoring may have reduced some reading miscues, continuous intervention is needed to strengthen pronunciation, vocabulary mastery, and reading automaticity.

To further determine the effectiveness of the Peer Tutoring Strategy, it was essential to statistically analyze the differences between the students' pre-test and post-test scores. This comparison provides more than just descriptive insights, as it objectively establishes whether the observed improvements in reading skills are significant and attributable to the intervention rather than chance. Recent research underscores the importance of measuring statistical significance in intervention studies to validate the reliability of findings and evaluate the true impact of instructional strategies. Alegre et al. (2021) employed a pre-test/post-test design in evaluating peer tutoring for learning statistics and probability among middle school students. Their results revealed no significant differences at pre-test, followed by statistically significant improvements post-intervention ($p < .01$) and a medium to large effect size (Hedges's $g = 0.72$), demonstrating how statistical analysis substantiates the measurable gains produced by peer tutoring.

Table 6

Test of Significant Difference Between the Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores of the Tutees in Vocabulary

Level of Performance	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	Statistic	p	Decision	Interpretation
POSTTEST	96.1	2.35	5.49	7.27	<.001	Reject	Significant
PRETEST	90.6	4.71				Ho	

Effect Size = 1.18

*Significant if $p < 0.05$

Note. $H_0: \mu \text{ Measure 1} - \text{Measure 2} = 0$

The statistical analysis Table 6 revealed a significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores. The mean score improved from 90.6 to 96.1, with a mean difference of 5.49. The test statistics were 7.27, and the p-value < .001, which is well below the 0.05 significance level. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected, confirming that the peer tutoring strategy had a significant positive effect on students' reading performance. The effect size of 1.18 indicates a large effect, meaning the improvement was not only statistically significant but also educationally meaningful.

Beyond the test scores, it is equally important to consider how students themselves perceive the Peer Tutoring Strategy, since their experiences and attitudes directly influence the effectiveness and sustainability of the approach. Learners' perceptions provide valuable insights into the benefits they gained, the challenges they encountered, and their overall evaluation of the strategy as a tool for improving reading skills. Recent studies emphasize that students' voices are critical in assessing educational interventions, as positive perceptions often correlate with higher engagement and motivation, while identified challenges guide future refinements (Rahman & Arifin, 2022; Santoso & Fitria, 2021). In this study, the perceptions of the tutees highlight not only the academic impact of peer tutoring but also its role in shaping their confidence, collaboration, and attitudes toward reading.

Table 7

The Tutees' Perceptions Regarding the Use of the Peer Tutoring Strategy.

Perception	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	SD	Mean	Verbal Description
Perceived Benefits	0	1	4	22	11	0.50	3.99	Agree
Perceived Effectiveness	0	0	6	19	13	0.49	4.05	Agree
Challenges Encountered	3	18	14	3	0	0.61	2.64	Neutral

Legend: 1.00-1.80 Strongly Disagree; 1.81-2.60 Disagree; 2.61-3.40 Neutral; 3.41-4.20 Agree; 4.21-5.00 Strongly Agree

Most students agreed that peer tutoring brought positive benefits. With a mean of 3.99 (*Agree*), learners recognized that the strategy enhanced their reading skills, confidence, and engagement. Very few students disagreed, which suggests strong acceptance of the intervention. Students also rated the peer tutoring as effective, with a mean of

4.05 (*Agree*). This shows that they found the method useful in helping them understand reading tasks better, improve fluency, and achieve greater independence in reading.

In terms of the challenges, the perception was rated *Neutral* with a mean of 2.64. Some students noted difficulties such as mismatched pacing between tutors and tutees, possible communication barriers, or uneven participation. However, since the response leaned toward neutral rather than disagree, it suggests that challenges existed but were not overwhelming. These findings are consistent with prior research, which has reported that although peer tutoring promotes academic gains, issues such as pacing differences and communication barriers may occasionally arise (Alegre et al., 2021; Chan & Lam, 2017).

The results of this study also demonstrate that the Peer Tutoring Strategy is a powerful tool in enhancing reading skills. Students transitioned from instructional and frustration levels toward independence, showing significant improvements supported by statistical analysis. This aligns with the findings of Flores Coll (2015) and Topping, Buchs, Duran, and Van Keer (2017), who emphasized that peer tutoring effectively fosters independence, improves reading proficiency, and strengthens learner confidence.

V. CONCLUSION

The study's findings reveal that the Peer Tutoring Strategy (PTS) is an effective intervention in enhancing the reading skills of the tutees. The pre-test results showed that most of the students were at the *Instructional level*, while some were at the *Frustration level*, and none achieved the *Independent level*, indicating that learners generally needed guidance in reading prior to the intervention. After the implementation of PTS, the post-test results demonstrated a remarkable improvement, with a majority of the students progressing to the *Independent level*, while the rest remained at the *Instructional level*, and no student was left in the *Frustration level*. A test of significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores confirmed that the gains were not due to chance. This establishes that PTS had a substantial and meaningful impact on improving students' reading performance. In terms of perceptions, the tutees expressed positive views toward the use of PTS. They agreed on its benefits such as increased confidence, enhanced comprehension, and better engagement in reading tasks. They also agreed on its effectiveness acknowledging that peer tutoring helped them become more independent and motivated readers. On the other hand, their responses regarding challenges were

neutral, suggesting that while difficulties such as pacing and communication differences existed, these were manageable and did not outweigh the positive effects of the strategy. Prior to peer tutoring, common errors included mispronunciations, omissions, and substitutions, which hindered reading fluency and comprehension. After the implementation of PTS, these miscues were noticeably reduced, reflecting an improvement in word recognition, accuracy, and overall reading fluency. Overall, the findings affirm that the Peer Tutoring Strategy not only improved students' reading performance but also fostered positive learner perceptions, thereby supporting it as an instructional approach to enhance reading skills. Based on the findings, the Peer Tutoring Strategy (PTS) proved to be an effective intervention in enhancing the reading skills of the students. The results showed that learners who initially performed at the frustration and instructional levels significantly improved after the implementation of PTS, with the majority progressing to the independent level.

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Navigating the Complexities of Male-Dominated Societies: A Study of Selected Texts by Ama Ata Aidoo

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Abstract— Ama Ata Aidoo's artistic works have focused on Ghanaian realities of feminism, as evident in her novels and fictions, *Changes: A Love Story* (1991) and *The Girl Who Can* (1999). In these two texts, Aidoo attempts to depict modern feminine masculinity through the lives of Esi and Adjoa. This study is guided by the questions of how Aidoo navigates the complexities of contemporary women's lives, grappling with societal expectations, and how she presents the journey of self-actualisation in male-dominated societies. Using the masculine feminist approach and content analysis as the design, this study asserts that the Ghanaian woman is a strong individual who allows for ambition and choice and stresses the need for emancipation in a male-dominated society through resistance and assertiveness. While existing studies have examined feminism in Aidoo's works, few have explored how her concept of "masculine femininity" in both texts redefines resistance in male-dominated Ghanaian society, either through a comparative lens or in comparison with the texts themselves. This underscores Aidoo's dedication to portraying the struggles and successes of women, making her a central figure in this cause. With her powerful narratives and rich character development, her works engage with feminist and masculine perspectives. This study aims to contribute to the existing literature on feminist masculinity in contemporary society and deepen our understanding of the Ghanaian woman's life and environment, thereby expanding self-awareness to achieve transformative change and shift perspective on how African society views women, ultimately calling for a new feminine identity.



Keywords— Complexity, Empowerment, Feminism, Male-Dominated, Masculinity.

I. INTRODUCTION

In African literature, the portrayal of women has often been shaped by patriarchal norms. Ama Ata Aidoo challenges this tradition by highlighting the voices and experiences of women. Her works depict the tensions between tradition and modernity, as well as between individual agency and societal expectations. As Sackeyfio notes, Aidoo's fiction "presents paradoxical outcomes for women characters as they respond to patriarchy, urbanisation, and the conflicting demands of modernity". African women novelists have made significant progress in their creative writing by redefining the image of women and reducing stereotypes present in novels from decades past. Through their talent, they have created strong, capable female characters. Today, many resilient and admirable women are portrayed in African literature such

as Efuru in the text *Efuru* by F. Nwapa who was independent, successful, and a trader who was also deeply spiritual, Mariam and Laila in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini who faced extreme patriarchal oppression and stood their grounds, Nyasha in *Nervous Conditions* by Tsitsi Dangarembga who was brilliant and a complex character who fought psychological and cultural battles, Firdaus in *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El Saadawi who is exploited by every man she meets-uncle, husband, pimp, and client yet her resilience culminates in a radical act. Elizabeth and the Women of the Cell Block in *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* by Njabulo S. Ndebele presents a collective resilience that re-imagines the lives of women who, like Winnie Mandela, were left behind by their husbands who were political exiles, prisoners, or

migrant labourers. These examples highlight values that offer more constructive models for society.

Literature reflects life; the events it portrays mirror societal realities. Therefore, it is fitting that social inequalities between men and women gradually diminish in our society, as Mezu asserts in her work *A History of Africana Women's Literature* (1993). She describes the reconstructive phase of female writing, a more hopeful stage she calls womanist creativity, which uses literary devices and resources to create strong female characters. These women are no longer passive victims of social injustice but are women who command their communities' attention through their creative power.

The circumstance mentioned above is demonstrated by the increasing awareness among African women writers that their novels and dramas create heroines who portray women's self-definition as an evolving process. Some authors from the earlier generation of African women writers have shifted how they depict African women, presenting them as radical heroines and symbols of social change. Their portrayal of the African woman not only as a symbol of social change but also as radical heroines can be seen in works like Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966), Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1977), Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* (1979), Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa* (1980), *The Girl Who Can* (1999), and *Changes: A Love Story* (1991) among others. These shifts in the perception of the African woman are evident in recent writings by African female authors. Examples include Kauna, a radical heroine created in Neshani Andreas's *Purple Violet of Oshantu* (2003); Ifeoma in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003); and Nyansha, in Tsi Dangarembga's *The Book of Not* (2006), among others.

Ama Ata Aidoo is a prominent literary figure in Africa. Her works focus on women and their struggles within a patriarchal society. In *Changes: A Love Story* and *The Girl Who Can*, the author introduces readers to unconventional women who challenge traditional notions of femininity. These texts showcase what scholars refer to as 'masculine femininity,' meaning the portrayal of traits typically associated with men (such as strength, independence, and resistance) within female characters. This study examines how Aidoo portrays women navigating male-dominated social environments and analyses how she conveys the experiences of her female characters to redefine resistance and create new spaces for a renewed sense of womanhood.

1.1 Background to the Study

Gendered roles in African societies have been shaped for centuries by traditional, colonial, and religious practices that often value men and, typically, subordinate women. Across Africa, and Ghana in particular, women are

frequently defined by their roles as wives, mothers, and caregivers through identities and images associated with womanhood that often imply subservience and sacrifice. Although the fight for women's rights across the continent has made significant progress over the years, many women still must navigate a profoundly patriarchal society. Literature has often served as a vivid space where these gendered realities are challenged and reimagined.

Ama Ata Aidoo, a trailblazer in Ghanaian literature, has explored the intricate dynamics of gender relations in African society through her fiction. Chakraborty (2024) notes that Aidoo writes as a feminist and, through her work, questions cultural norms that limit women's choices and undermine patriarchal systems that suppress female power. Her novels and short stories focus on the intersection of tradition and modernity, examining the potential for female self-definition and offering complex, layered portrayals of women that defy stereotypes.

Two of her most explored works, *Changes: A Love Story* (1991) and *The Girl Who Can* (1997), contain sharply honed critiques of how society defines what it means to be a woman. In *Changes*, Aidoo represents a woman, Esi Sekyi, who dares to challenge the cultural and romantic ideologies that underpin marriage. Through her decision to divorce the husband who has raped her and the transition into a polygamous marriage of her choosing, Esi practices a kind of resistance which disrupts the stereotyped notions of what it means to be feminine. In Esi, Aidoo draws a character who epitomises some personality traits typically considered to be male, such as independence, ambition, and emotional control, while remaining distinctly female.

Similarly, *The Girl Who Can* tells the story of Adjoa, a little girl living in the village, who struggles to come to terms with her body and the cultural expectations of womanhood. Told that her "thin legs" disqualify her from childbirth (which, along with the ability to cook and "satisfy a man," is the bedrock of a woman's worth), Adjoa gains a sense of identity and control through athletics. Her triumph very gently sends up the calculation with which female bodies are judged by reproductive value, and how even very young girls are subject to social evaluation. Her subtle assurance and eventual vindication are the earliest indications of a self-aware woman who takes her body and her future back into her own hands.

Both texts foreground what scholars, such as Bell Hooks (2004), have termed "feminist masculinity," in which strength, autonomy, and assertiveness are repatriated as not-male traits. Although previous feminist readings of Aidoo's works have addressed such issues as marriage, polygyny, and gender disparity, less attention has been given to how Aidoo employs the notion of "masculine

femininity” to redefine forms of resistance within male-dominated environments. This paper aims to close that gap by exploring how Aidoo’s women characters embrace a revised feminine identity that refutes, negotiates, and, eventually, redefines what it means to be a woman in present-day Ghana.

However, these books are significant: they push the dialogue about African feminism beyond the rut of victimhood. They underscore how African women, whether professionals like Esi or schoolgirls like Adjoa, can fight back against domination not by rejecting oppressive systems outright, but by transforming those systems from the inside out. It reflects how deeply Aidoo’s feminist vision runs: between an uncritical African traditionalism and a romantic Western ideology, we see her staking out an authentic, African-centred feminist identity.

In an age of contested and fluid gender identities, Aidoo’s depictions are still relevant. They invite readers to view African women not as passive recipients of change, but as catalysts, women who, through daring risks and quiet resilience, negotiate the difficult circumstances of patriarchy and emerge anew.

In the traditional African context, particularly in Ghana, a woman’s dress, speech, and very being are ultimately shaped by her gender expectations. Women are still often expected to conform to traditional roles of submission, marriage, and motherhood, sometimes at the expense of self-actualisation, independence, and ambition, despite progress in education, employment, and rights awareness. These hierarchical gender roles are upheld by cultural, religious, and socio-political systems that diminish women’s voices and suppress their agency.

Despite the increase in feminist consciousness, much of the feminist discourse has been shaped by the focus on women’s oppression, victimisation, and the quest for freedom through resistance. Yet, very little attention has been paid to “masculine femininity,” the ability of a woman to empower herself through qualities deemed masculine, such as independence, dominance, and autonomy, without necessarily forfeiting her femininity.

Ama Ata Aidoo’s writings, especially *Changes: A Love Story* and *The Girl Who Can*, present an intriguing and unexplored perspective for analysing this trend. In these works, Aidoo depicts female characters who adopt masculine traits not to reject femininity but to survive and thrive within patriarchal societies. Although Aidoo’s work is among the earliest contributions to African feminist literature, little has been written to date about how her portrayal of these “masculine” women shapes our understanding of resistance and identity in a Ghanaian context.

This lack of scholarship raises essential questions: How does Aidoo employ her characters to challenge traditional womanhood? How do Esi and Adjoa challenge and reconstruct “femininity” by way of male characteristics? And what does this narrative strategy add to our comprehension of African feminist theory?

By examining these issues, this paper aims to fill a gap in the scholarship and to contribute to the dialogue on feminist identity, power, and resistance in postcolonial African literature. The study is essential for literary scholars and those discussing gender across Africa more broadly. It contributes to the expanding field of African feminist literary criticism by exploring an overlooked aspect: the concept of masculine femininity as both a strategic response and a declaration of self within a patriarchal society.

Furthermore, the study shed light on Ama Ata Aidoo’s writings. Although Aidoo is well known for her feminist themes, this analysis shows that her characters, far from just being victims of patriarchy, are women who respond to oppression in non-conformist, non-traditional ways. Characters like Esi in *Changes: A Love Story* and Adjoa in *The Girl Who Can* are not just fighting; they are redefining what it means to be a woman in their cultures. This reading adds further nuance to Aidoo’s feminist vision, enabling her to strengthen and maintain her influence in both academic and public discourses on gender stereotyping and identity struggles.

Again, in an educational context, the study will be highly beneficial for students and teachers of literature, gender studies, and African studies, as it examines how what we read reflects and challenges dominant gender norms beyond the written page. As a result, students become equipped to read more critically. It will be better able to use literature to engage with other societal issues they encounter. It promotes critical thinking about gender roles, power dynamics, and cultural identity.

Ultimately, this study has the potential to contribute to ongoing debates about gender equality, identity construction, and social change in contemporary Ghana and Africa. In a world that appears deeply unsettled by shifting ideals about gender, works like Aidoo’s are a reminder that, for many women, rejecting culture is to lose a piece of oneself, rather than asserting independence.

1.2 Feminist Masculinity

The analysis draws on the theory of feminist masculinity, a term popularised by Bell Hooks (2004), who argues that masculinity does not need to be associated with domination or violence. Instead, women can adopt so-called masculine traits, such as courage, agency, and assertiveness, without losing their feminine identity.

Raewyn Connell (2005) also describes “hegemonic masculinity” as the dominant form of masculinity in any society but notes that alternative masculinities, including those embodied by women, can challenge this dominance.

Aidoo's female characters embody these alternative masculinities. Her portrayal challenges not only patriarchal norms but also calls for a redefinition of what it means to be a woman in contemporary African society.

Georgina Brookman et al. (2020) analyse how education empowers Aidoo's female characters to assert themselves in their paper *Education and the Assertive Woman: A Case Study of Ama Ata Aidoo's Changes* and conclude that there have been positive changes in women's roles over the years. This change has resulted from women's pursuit of self-assertion through education and their efforts to help liberate their families from cultural and societal dogmas where women faced subjugation and marginalisation. They highlight that a notable observation is the increasing intentionality with which writers assign more respectable roles to female characters in novels over time. A key conclusion from the study is that education remains a vital tool for enhancing women's assertiveness; however, it is not the sole solution to this issue.

Olumide Ogunrotimi (2015) discusses the tension between feminism and womanism in Ama Ata Aidoo's portrayal of Esi in "Womanist Dilemma in Africa: A Study of *Changes*" (2015). Through the discussion, he concludes that the quandary of the protagonist further externalises the dilemma of Womanism in Africa: to imbibe the individualistic and confrontational values of Feminism or to remain faithful to the tradition of Womanism, which celebrates femininity as a complement to masculinity and venerates motherhood as a unique female faculty.

Monique Oshame Ekpong (2011), in "Creating Political Space for Women in Social and National Domains", examines how Aidoo's short stories, including *The Girl Who Can*, challenge gender myths and promote female agency. She concludes that Aidoo breaks down complacency and reveals that most myths that tend to inhibit women are social constructs that can be reversed. Aidoo seems to input that if women could be so self-effacing, other-oriented and generous as to produce such achievers and rivals to men in their, hitherto, exclusive domains of life's endeavour, then they should all be allowed to participate as collaborators in the development of Africa in alternative economic and political roles and the enjoyment of the fruits of their labour and the natural resources of their African continent.

Again, Rituparna Chakraborty in *Interrogating the repressive voice of patriarchy: Analysis of Ama Ata Aidoo's story, The Girl Who Can*, interrogates the

repressive voice in a patriarchal society and concludes that the struggle of African women in postcolonial African society is portrayed across generations; therefore, education is deemed as the only tool to combat those inequalities.

Makonnen Tendaji (2018), in his paper *A Critical Analysis of Ama Ata Aidoo's Changes: A Love Story*, explores gender oppression, classism, and the contradictions of modern African womanhood. It reveals the struggles African women face in balancing societal pressures regarding marriage and personal independence. Through the dialogue between the two main characters, Esi and Opokuya, the narrative explores themes of gender oppression, classism, and the precarious nature of female relationships, ultimately portraying the complexities of postcolonial African womanhood. Aidoo's work not only highlights personal dilemmas but also reflects broader socio-economic challenges, providing a powerful commentary on the status of women within African societies.

II. DISCUSSION

2.1 The Challenges Faced by the Modern Woman in Aidoo's Works

In *Changes: A Love Story*, Esi Sekyi is a highly educated, independent woman working as a government statistician in Accra. Her decision to have children challenges societal norms and expectations. While her husband expects her to assume the role of a wife by giving birth, Esi, after her first child, decided not to limit herself to childbearing. She insists on not giving birth anytime soon. She was never under pressure from society and her husband to give birth, which highlights her body autonomy. Aidoo informs, through Oko, that,

Esi had never stated it categorically that she didn't want any more children. But she was on those dreadful birth control things: pills, loops or whatever. She had gone on them soon after the child was born, and no amount of reasoning and pleading had persuaded her to go off them. (p. 8)

While Oko believes it is good for Esi to give him at least two boys in addition to a girl, Esi asserts that she isn't ready to bear another child. Society believes that a man leads in making decisions about childbearing in marriage, but Esi here takes complete control of this, insisting on what is good for her instead.

Esi does not allow for limitations in the name of a wife. She challenges the restrictions placed on many women in their marriages by prioritising her work over her duties as a wife. Oko recounts that, "*Esi puts her career well above*

any duties she owed as a wife" (p. 8). This sense of pride and competence situates her within a traditionally male-coded space, public service, statistics, and decision-making. Her husband, Oko, is threatened by her ambition, lamenting,

Esi's refusal to apologise for prioritising her career demonstrates her masculine femininity. "*It's not as if I want you to stop working. But must the work come before me and the child?*" (p.10). She is not rejecting her gender, but expanding its definition. Esi's resistance to patriarchal expectations is framed not as rebellion for its own sake but as a desire for autonomy and self-definition. This aligns with Bell Hooks' (2004) concept of feminist masculinity, which calls for women to embrace strength, emotional discipline, and independence as forms of resistance and self-love.

Esi subsequently divorces her husband, Oko, after he rapes her, a marital rape often silenced or dismissed in society, marking a bold assertion of her bodily autonomy. "*If a man can rape his wife,*" she asks, "*what then is marriage?*" (p. 49). This question exposes the violent undercurrents in patriarchal marital expectations. Perhaps the most radical assertion of Esi's agency occurs when she divorces Oko after he rapes her.

"*I just lay there, unable to believe it. I mean, it's not as if I'm his wife or anything.*" (p. 37) Aidoo uses irony to critique the cultural normalisation of marital rape. Esi's decision to walk away from the marriage is a bold act of resistance. She asserts that her body is her own, echoing Bell Hooks' (2000) idea that feminist masculinity centres on "respect for boundaries and self-determination". (p. 68 Routledge edition).

Esi's rejection of societal norms reflects her masculine femininity. She is career-oriented, chooses to live alone, and only remarries under the terms of a polygamous arrangement that grants her personal space.

In a surprising turn, Esi agrees to become Ali's second wife, even though he is already married. However, she does so not out of submission, but calculation:

"*She thought, with Ali, she would have the freedom she had always wanted, no expectations to cook or mother. Just herself, and her space*" (p.143). While polygamy is a patriarchal institution, Esi reclaims it for her purposes. She is not emotionally dependent on Ali, nor does she surrender her professional life. This aligns with Connell's (2005) notion of *gender performance*; Esi performs traditional roles (wife, lover) on her terms, subverting their original intent. Yet, her experiment fails. Ali begins neglecting her, proving that structural patriarchy remains resilient. Aidoo writes: "She had wanted freedom. But it came wrapped in emptiness."

This moment reveals the limits of masculine femininity in a profoundly patriarchal society. Esi's resistance is not romanticised; it is complex, painful, and sometimes isolating.

Similarly, in *The Girl Who Can*, Adjoa, a young girl in rural Ghana, is mocked for having thin legs, seen as unfit for childbearing, the ultimate feminine role in her community. Her grandmother says, "*A woman must have good, strong legs to be able to carry children*" (p. 27).

Yet, Adjoa excels in athletics, winning races at school. This becomes her form of empowerment. Through sports, she reclaims her body not as a reproductive tool but as a symbol of strength and purpose.

To highlight how the pressure to be marriageable begins at a shockingly young age, robbing a girl of her childhood, Adjoa says, "My mother and my grandmother always disagreed about whether, with my legs, I would be able to find a husband. They seemed to have forgotten that I was only seven years old." (p.1-2) Breaking free from tradition requires not just defying men, but also disappointing or challenging the women who have raised you and who represent the established, "safe" path.

"Nana would argue that you need good hips to be able to have children. 'Slim people, and especially slim women, don't have children easily'" (p.3). Nana here represents the voice of tradition, linking physicality directly to a woman's perceived biological destiny.

"My mother would have replied, 'But Adjoa is not a boy' (p. 4), and that would have been that." This simple statement shows how gender roles are rigidly enforced. Adjoa's potential (running) is initially dismissed because it doesn't align with what girls are "supposed" to do.

Adjoa is caught between navigating two models: her grandmother Nana, who is traditionally rooted and focused on family and her mother, who is slightly more modern, a working woman, but still constrained by tradition. This represents the modern woman's challenge of forging a new path from disparate influences. The entire dynamic between Nana and Maami represents this conflict. Adjoa is the battleground for their differing, yet both limited, views on what a woman should be. She has to reconcile the wisdom of the past with the opportunities of the present without completely rejecting either. She must find a third way.

To resolve this, she must use her unique talents and achievements to prompt a re-evaluation of the outdated norms that her grandmother especially clings to. She uses her athletic prowess to succeed so visibly that the community is compelled to redefine what is valuable and beautiful in a woman. And for the first time, she asserts,

everybody in the village agreed that my legs were not too thin... In fact, they decided, my legs were not too long... they were just the right legs for a runner... (p. 25 - 26). This is the moment of triumph.

Again, after Adjoa won her race, Aidoo states, "*And Nana... had been shaking her head and saying something like, 'Who would have thought it?'*" (p. 27) Adjoa's success compels Nana, the bastion of tradition, to question her own deeply held beliefs. Adjoa hasn't just won a race; she has earned the right to define her own body and its potential.

2.2 Masculine Femininity and Resistance

In *Changes*, Esi Sekyi embodies masculine-coded traits: she is career-driven, emotionally detached, and sexually autonomous. Yet, her story critiques the limits of masculine autonomy in a patriarchal society that still expects women to conform emotionally and socially. Her decision to leave her marriage and enter a polygamous relationship is a masculine feminist act, asserting agency while navigating cultural constraints.

In *The Girl Who Can*, Adjoa's physical strength and competitive spirit challenge traditional femininity. Her triumph in running symbolises a way of reclaiming masculine energy to empower girls. Her grandmother's eventual support reflects a shift in generational thinking, where masculine traits in girls are no longer feared but celebrated. Similarly, Theresah Ennin (2014) examines how Aidoo's Anowa challenges hegemonic masculinity, demonstrating that both men and women are influenced and limited by gender expectations.

The characters of Esi and Adjoa reflect Aidoo's reconstruction of femininity through resistance. Their defiance of expectations is not aggressive but rooted in quiet strength and personal agency. Scholar Lindsay Green-Simms (2012) points out that *Changes* presents "feminism not as ideology, but as lived contradiction." Esi seeks love, but on her terms, challenging both patriarchy and the romantic ideal.

Esi's masculine femininity also shows in her emotional restraint. Unlike the typical image of the emotionally dependent woman, she remains calm and detached, even when her second marriage to Ali disintegrates due to neglect. Aidoo writes: "*She did not cry. There were no tears left.*" (p. 164). Her strength is rooted in endurance and self-possession; qualities often culturally coded as masculine.

In Adjoa's case, her resistance initially remains silent. She listens to the debates about her legs but never internalises the shame. When she begins to win races, her grandmother's tone changes: "Those are the legs of a winner!" (p. 29). This transformation illustrates how even

subtle resistance can gradually alter one's perspective. As Nana Wilson-Tagoe (2000) suggests, Aidoo's young female characters often "challenge adult perceptions and redefine strength on their own terms." Olusegun Olu-Osayomi (2023) suggests that Aidoo's feminist imagery frequently conceals a deeper masculine energy, implying that her protagonists adopt a male perspective to challenge traditional gender roles.

Again, Adjoa does not argue with her critics; she simply goes out and wins. By becoming a champion runner, she uses her "thin legs", the symbol of her inadequacy, to accomplish something extraordinary. She demonstrates that the definition of a "useful" or "admirable" female body is flawed. "And for the first time, everybody in the village agreed that my legs were not too thin... In fact, they decided, my legs were not too long... they were just the right legs for a runner..." She uses resistance through excelling in what is believed to be the "Masculine" domain.

It is undoubtedly clear that Adjoa's most significant resistance is her silence turning into unignorable action. She couldn't find the words to defend herself, so she let her body do the talking. Her victory is a powerful, non-verbal argument that is more effective than any plea she could have made. "There are some things that you cannot say to anyone, not even to your own mother." (p. 117) This implies that some truths can only be *demonstrated*, not spoken.

2.3 Comparative Analysis of Esi and Adjoa

Although Esi and Adjoa differ in age and circumstances, they share a common trait: self-determination. Esi's struggle is intellectual and existential, navigating modern urban life while balancing work, love, and motherhood. Adjoa's challenge is physical and social, asserting her body's value beyond reproductive function.

Esi's decisions are deliberate, even when painful. She chooses polygamy not out of tradition, but pragmatism. Yet her disappointment with Ali's divided attention reveals a critique of polygamy that still favours men. Aidoo writes: "She had wanted freedom, but not loneliness." This paradox reflects the fact that masculine femininity is not a perfect solution but a necessary stance for survival in a world with no easy answers.

In contrast, Adjoa's story concludes on a more hopeful note. By embracing her body through athletics, she gains acceptance and empowerment within the same society that once doubted her. Her grandmother's eventual support shows that change can occur even within traditional frameworks.

Both Esi and Adjoa complicate the meaning of being a “woman” within their respective contexts. They are neither symbols of Western liberalism nor strictly bound by tradition. Instead, they occupy liminal positions, navigating complex social expectations. Esi, with her cool detachment, prefers solitude over performative happiness. Adjoa, with her quiet resilience, reclaims her body through sports. Together, they challenge what Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) calls the “seven mountains” African women must climb: tradition, poverty, male dominance, colonialism, race, motherhood, and internalised inferiority.

2.4 Aidoo’s Narrative Style and Symbolism

Ama Ata Aidoo’s narrative style and symbolism are crucial to her literary strength, enabling her to challenge patriarchal norms and explore African identity with subtlety and depth. Her writing style also supports her themes. In *Changes*, she employs free indirect discourse to fluidly move in and out of Esi’s thoughts, revealing her internal struggles. The title itself, *Changes*, signifies transformation, both personal and societal.

Again, Aidoo often writes in a style that mimics oral storytelling, drawing on Ghanaian traditions to convey a conversational and intimate tone. In *The Girl Who Can*, the child narrator Adjoa speaks with innocence and wit, creating a tone that is both engaging and revealing of adult contradictions.

Aidoo employs first-person narration to centre female voices. Esi in *Changes* and Adjoa in *The Girl Who Can* offer deeply personal insights into their worlds, revealing their internal struggles and triumphs to readers. In *The Girl Who Can*, the use of first-person narration from a young girl adds an innocent tone to serious critiques. The title, once again, is symbolic: Adjoa can, and she does.

Dialogue and silence are tools Aidoo uses in *Changes* and *The Girl Who Can* to reveal tensions among her characters. Silence, especially in *The Girl Who Can*, is symbolic: Adjoa’s mother’s quiet resistance contrasts with Nana’s vocal traditionalism. For Adjoa, like her mother, silence is not a sign of weakness; it is a tactic. She waits, observes, and ultimately proves her worth through her actions rather than her words. Her victory in the race becomes a powerful statement made without words. It forces others to reconsider their assumptions, demonstrating that resistance does not always have to be vocal to be effective.

In *Changes*, Esi’s conversations with her friend Opokuya and her husband Oko reveal her internal conflict between independence and intimacy. And her dialogue with Ali, her second husband, is often clipped and pragmatic, echoing her emotional distance and the transactional nature of their relationship.

Symbolism relies on the reader’s capacity to interpret underlying messages, often influenced by cultural or contextual clues. Aidoo employs Adjoa’s legs in *The Girl Who Can* “thin legs” to symbolise societal expectations of femininity and reproductive ability. Initially regarded as a flaw, they become a source of pride when she wins a race, challenging the notion that a woman’s worth depends on her body’s conformity to tradition. She then uses the symbol of “running and walking” to signify freedom and self-discovery once again. Adjoa’s skill in running swiftly becomes a metaphor for breaking free from restrictive cultural narratives.

Marriage acts as a symbol of societal control over women’s autonomy. Esi’s rejection of monogamy and her embrace of polygamy are not acts of liberation but serve as a critique of how even alternative structures can sustain male dominance.

She again employs silence and her characters’ voices to symbolise repression and resistance. Characters who speak out, such as Esi, and the quiet ones, like Adjoa, often face backlash in different circumstances, yet their voices remain central to the narrative’s strength. The recurring symbolism of the body, Esi’s need for personal space, and Adjoa’s legs serve as a powerful feminist device. It reclaims the female body from patriarchal expectations and redefines it as a site of agency. Her portrayal of silence challenges the idea that empowerment must be loud. In both texts, silence becomes a tool of agency, enabling women and girls to navigate oppressive structures while preserving their inner strength.

2.5 Broader Implications for African Feminist Discourse

Aidoo’s work makes a significant contribution to African feminist discourse. Her characters do not reject culture outright, but negotiate with it. As Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) argues, African feminism must be “responsive to the peculiarities of the African woman’s condition.” Aidoo echoes this by placing her characters within their cultural context, yet allowing them space for individual agency. Her characters are not just fictional; they are ideological tools that challenge readers to rethink gender roles and societal expectations. Her concept of masculine femininity also aligns with Sylvia Tamale’s (2006) view that African women often use “creative pragmatism” to resist patriarchy. Esi does not shout or march; she simply lives on her own terms. Adjoa does not argue with her grandmother; she runs. These subtle acts of resistance are influential in their own right. She doesn’t just write about women, she writes for them, with them, and through them. Her work is a call to reimagine feminism not as a borrowed ideology, but as a lived, local, and freeing force.

More than just books, Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story* and *The Girl Who Can* are transformative works that push the boundaries of African feminist discourse. Aidoo develops a feminist framework that is both radical and rooted by emphasising local experiences, authentic voices, and nuanced representations of African womanhood. Her writing entirely shifts the narrative by enabling African women to define themselves on their own terms.

III. CONCLUSION

Ama Ata Aidoo's works provide deep insights into the lives of Ghanaian women who challenge and redefine traditional gender roles. Through the characters of Esi and Adjoa, Aidoo convincingly argues that strength, choice, and resistance are not opposed to femininity but are part of an evolving understanding of what it means to be a woman in African society. These characters break stereotypes not by rejecting femininity but by broadening its scope, adopting traits typically associated with men and reshaping them to serve their own purposes. In doing so, they become symbols of masculine femininity, women who are independent, self-aware, and powerful in their own right. Notably, Aidoo does not romanticise resistance. Esi's isolation and Adjoa's quiet struggle remind us that change involves sacrifice. Nonetheless, these stories also suggest that transformation is possible, both within individuals and across generations. Aidoo's characters often embody what Olu-Osayomi describes as "feminist imagery and masculine energy". Her female protagonists are assertive, intelligent, and emotionally complex. They challenge the binary of male dominance and female submission, instead embodying a spectrum of identities that reflect the fluidity of gender roles in postcolonial African societies. Her literary contributions offer a strong critique of male-dominated societies. Through her nuanced characters and layered storytelling, she uncovers the contradictions of patriarchy and envisions alternative futures for African women. These characters spark discussion within African families, communities, and institutions, as well as among readers. Her works remain essential for understanding the intersections of gender, tradition, and modernity in African literature.

The study, therefore, concludes that masculine femininity is a vital strategy of feminist resistance and self-definition in Aidoo's fiction. It provides an empowering framework for understanding the complex identities of African women as they navigate the intersection of modernity and tradition.

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Translation Strategies for Political Texts from a Hypotaxis-Parataxis Perspective with Reference to the 2025 Government Work Report

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Abstract— From the perspective of hypotaxis and parataxis, this study conducts an analysis of the Chinese-English translation strategies adopted in the 2025 Government Work Report, and explores the essential differences between the two languages in terms of syntactic structure, logical expression and textual organization. The findings indicate that English attaches great importance to linguistic form and structure, with a clear distinction between primary and secondary components within sentences, whereas Chinese emphasizes the overall logic, coherence and semantic expression of language, without a distinct hierarchy among internal components. Through a comparative analysis of typical sentence segments in the Report, this paper reveals that there exist many structural transformations from parataxis to hypotaxis in the English translation process. These transformations not only reflect the structural characteristics of English and Chinese, but also play a crucial role in clarifying logic, explicating responsible subjects and enhancing international acceptability in the process of ideological communication.

Keywords— hypotaxis; parataxis; Government Work Report; structural transformation



I. INTRODUCTION

The Government Work Report, as a typical, representative, and periodic political document, covers a wide range of content and serves as an important channel for the international community to understand China and a window for China's external communication. It plays a crucial role in accelerating the construction of China's discourse and narrative systems, telling China's stories well, and communicating China's voice effectively. Within the two distinct language families of English and Chinese, the contrast between hypotaxis and parataxis represents one of their most significant differences. Chinese frequently uses personal subjects and active voice, while English often employs impersonal subjects and passive voice. Furthermore, Chinese syntax is guided by meaning, where sentence construction revolves around the core axis of conceptual intent, focusing on the expression of the meaning itself. English syntax adheres to form, where sentence construction centers on the subject-predicate structure, strictly following formal grammatical rules. This difference is particularly pronounced in the translation of

political texts, as political discourse is typically characterized by rigorous logic, clear accountability, and multiple layers of meaning. The purpose of this study is, while respecting the linguistic differences between English and Chinese, to focus on the core characteristics of hypotaxis and parataxis, thereby providing a translation approach for political texts that is grounded in theory and practical applicability.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Hypotaxis and parataxis are central topics in the contrastive study of English and Chinese languages. Tracing the origin of these concepts, they were explicitly proposed by the linguist Wang Li in his work Chinese Grammar Theory (1954): "Chinese compound sentences often employ parataxis, which is referred to as 'parataxis' in Western languages. Parataxis is an anomaly in Western languages but is the norm in Chinese. Chinese relies heavily on parataxis, where connective elements are often not necessary; Western languages rely more on hypotaxis, where connective elements are indispensable in most

cases." Here, Mr. Wang Li points out their most fundamental distinction: Chinese achieves coherence by relying on inherent semantic relationships and context (parataxis), while Western languages rely more on formal means for connection (hypotaxis).

The renowned linguist Lian Shuneng also offers profound insights: English emphasizes hypotaxis, valuing structural rigor and often employing various explicit cohesive devices; Chinese emphasizes parataxis, focusing on functional and semantic expression, often relying on word order and internal logical connections, resulting in concise forms. Specifically, hypotaxis refers to languages expressing syntactic relationships and logical hierarchy through formal markers (such as conjunctions, relative pronouns, prepositions, inflections, etc.); parataxis refers to languages achieving coherence primarily through semantic relationships, context, and logical reasoning, with minimal use of formal markers (Nida, 1982). English is a typical hypotactic language; sentences are built around the subject-predicate core, constructing complex, lengthy sentences through explicit relationships of subordination, coordination, and modification, making logic externally visible. Chinese is a typical paratactic language; sentence structures are looser, often comprising run-on sentences and coordinate clauses, with logical relationships frequently implied within word order and context (Wang Li, 1954).

English hypotactic devices are rich and varied, including relatives, conjunctions, prepositions, and other morphological changes. Statistics show there are approximately 100 common conjunctive words and about 286 prepositions in English. These devices appear with high frequency in political texts to ensure logical rigor and structural clarity. Chinese parataxis primarily relies on word order, repetition, parallelism, antithesis, contracted sentences, and four-character structures to achieve semantic coherence. Chinese has fewer prepositions (about 35), mostly grammaticalized from verbs, and conjunctions are often omissible.

III. TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

(I) Conversion of Parts of Speech

Chinese frequently uses verbs, giving sentences a strong sense of dynamism; English frequently uses nouns, prepositional phrases, and other static structures, making expression more concise, objective, and formal. In the English translation of the Government Work Report, converting verbs into nouns is a common technique. Making appropriate changes to certain parts of speech in the source text without altering meaning can make the translation more natural and fluent.

Example 1: 坚定不移全面深化改革扩大开放, 增

强发展内生动力。

Translation: We deepened reform and opening up comprehensively with unswerving commitment and boosted the internal momentum of development.

Analysis: The source text contains multiple action cores (深化, 扩大, 增强). The attitudinal modifier "坚定不移" is translated as "with unswerving commitment," achieving a conversion from dynamic to static expression through the prepositional structure "with + noun phrase" functioning as an adverbial. The verb-object structure "内生动力" is converted into the noun phrase "internal momentum," making the semantics more concise and the structure more compact. Meanwhile, the predicate verbs "deepened" and "boosted" are retained, forming a typical English sentence pattern of "verb + nominalized components."

Example 2: 大力推动创新驱动发展, 促进产业结构优化升级。

Translation: We made major efforts to promote innovation-driven development and upgraded the industrial structure.

Analysis: "大力推动" is translated as "made major efforts to promote," converting the Chinese adverb "大力," which intensifies the action, into the noun phrase "major efforts." The entire structure shifts from "adverbial + verb" to "verb + noun + infinitive," demonstrating static treatment in English. "创新驱动发展," a four-character phrase with implied verbal relationships, is translated as the compound adjective-noun structure "innovation-driven development," which better aligns with the lexical habits of political texts.

(II) Addition of Words

The addition of words is a common expressive technique in translation, guided by the core principle of "adding words without adding meaning." Specifically, additions mainly fall into two categories: first, supplementing content implied by the source text's context and logical relationships but not explicitly stated on the surface (such additions must be rooted in the source text's semantic logic to ensure no deviation from core meaning); second, filling in elements omitted in the source text's grammatical structure to make the translation grammatically sound and semantically complete (e.g., elliptical sentences in English, implied subjects in Chinese, requiring addition to restore complete syntactic relations).

Example 3: 加大单边开放力度, 对所有同中国建交的最不发达国家产品全面给予零关税待遇。

Translation: We expanded unilateral opening up, adopting zero tariffs on all products from all the least developed countries that have diplomatic relations with China.

Analysis: The source text consists of two coordinate clauses, exhibiting two distinct paratactic features: first, subject ellipsis—the agent performing "加大" and "给予" is implied by context; second, implied logical relationship—a consequential logic of "overall measure → specific implementation" exists between the first clause "加大单边开放力度" and the second "给予零关税待遇," but no formal markers connect them; coherence is achieved solely through semantic association. By adding the omitted subject "We," the Chinese subjectless sentence is transformed into a complete English subject-predicate structure, clarifying the agent. The semantically implied logical connector is added by using the present participle phrase "adopting..." as an adverbial of accompaniment, constructing a hypotactic framework of "main clause + attendant adverbial" that replaces the paratactic semantic linkage of Chinese.

(III) Voice Transformation

The difference between parataxis and hypotaxis is also reflected in voice choice: Chinese emphasizes agent awareness, frequently using active voice, where the agent is often implied; English commonly uses passive voice, placing the "recipient of action" as the subject to downplay the agent and highlight objective facts. This transformation is a key strategy in political text translation for achieving the requirement of "objectivity and rigor."

Example 4: 脱贫攻坚成果持续巩固拓展, 义务教育、基本养老、基本医疗、社会救助等保障力度加大。

Translation: Achievements made in poverty alleviation were further consolidated and expanded, and greater support was provided for compulsory education, basic old-age insurance, basic medical insurance, and social assistance.

Analysis: In the source text, "巩固拓展" and "加大" are both active expressions, implying the government or relevant policies as the agent. The translation converts both to passive voice ("were consolidated and expanded"; "was provided"), placing "Achievements" and "support" in subject position, thereby emphasizing objective outcomes rather than the implementing agent, aligning with the English political text convention of focusing on facts. "脱贫攻坚成果" is translated as "Achievements made in poverty alleviation," using a past participle phrase as a postpositive modifier, making the structure compact and logically clear. "保障力度加大" is not directly translated as "strengthened support" but rendered as "greater support was provided," combining a comparative adjective with passive voice to convey the meaning of increased intensity within a static expression. The translation uses the coordinating conjunction "and" to connect the two passive clauses, forming a parallel structure "A were..., and B

was..., exhibiting English hypotactic characteristics while maintaining semantic coherence.

(IV) Division and Combination of Sentences

Division involves breaking down long or complex sentences from the source text into several simpler or shorter sentences for translation; combination involves integrating multiple independent sentences from the source text into one coherent sentence. Both aim to align with the target language's expressive habits and grammatical structure, thereby enhancing the translation's fluency. Chinese, emphasizing parataxis, uses a "topic-comment" framework, where clauses are strung together like bamboo joints to achieve semantic coherence. English, emphasizing hypotaxis, centers on a "main clause-subordinate clause" structure; sentence construction resembles a grapevine, where the main clause is the trunk supporting all components, and various clauses and modifiers are grapes attached to it, tightly integrated through hypotactic means like subordinating conjunctions and participle phrases, forming a semantically hierarchical system. In the Chinese-English translation of the Government Work Report, the application of combination is particularly significant and typical.

Example 5: 我们将坚持稳中求进、以进促稳, 守正创新、先立后破, 系统集成、协同配合。

Translation: We will stay committed to pursuing progress while ensuring stability, promoting stability through progress, upholding fundamental principles and breaking new ground, establishing the new before abolishing the old, and promoting systematic integration and efficient coordination.

Analysis: The source text is a typical slogan-style series of parallel phrases—six four-character structures arranged in parallel, semantically compact and rhythmically distinct. There are no conjunctions between the phrases; coherence relies on internal logic and context, reflecting the Chinese characteristic of "guiding form with meaning". The translation employs combination, integrating all six phrases under the same main structure "We will stay committed to..." and connecting the final coordinate element with "and," forming a series of parallel gerund phrases as the object: "V-ing₁, V-ing₂, V-ing₃, V-ing₄, and V-ing₅." Within each phrase, hypotactic devices like subordinating conjunctions ("while") and prepositions ("through," "before") are used to explicate logical relationships. For instance, "稳中求进" is translated as "pursuing progress while ensuring stability," accurately presenting the concurrent relationship of "seeking progress amidst stability."

IV. CONCLUSION

Using hypotaxis and parataxis as the theoretical framework and the bilingual texts of the 2025 Government Work Report as corpus, this paper analyzes the structural transformations and strategies manifested in the English translation of political texts. English exhibits hypotactic characteristics, emphasizing formal norms and structural rigor, with a clear hierarchy among language components and direct presentation of logical relationships. Chinese is characterized by parataxis, focusing on the inherent coherence and holistic expression of meaning, without the need to deliberately emphasize component hierarchy, and placing greater emphasis on contextual adaptation.

Through a comparative analysis of typical sentence segments in the Report, this paper summarizes common transformation strategies in the English translation process: conversion of parts of speech (e.g., static conversion of verbs to nouns/prepositional structures), addition of words (explicitation of subjects and logical connectors), voice transformation (objective conversion from active to passive), and division/combination of sentences (structural integration from Chinese run-on sentences to English complex sentences with subordination). These strategies are not applied in isolation but interweave to serve a core objective: while faithfully conveying semantics, achieving a structural transformation from Chinese parataxis to English hypotaxis, ensuring the translation conforms to English syntactic norms and adapts to the cognitive habits of an international audience.

This paper further confirms the explanatory and guiding power of the hypotaxis-parataxis framework in the field of political text translation, revealing the underlying thought and cognitive patterns reflected by linguistic structural differences. This aids translators in addressing key issues such as logic clarification, agent identification, and appropriate tone, thereby enhancing the translation's accuracy, acceptability, and communicative effectiveness. Only by deeply understanding and flexibly applying the corresponding transformation strategies can translators "capture the meaning" without "neglecting the form" in translation, truly achieving accurate transmission and effective communication of political discourse, and contributing to the construction of a discourse system that bridges China and the world.

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Walden and Ecotourism: Living and Travelling Responsibly

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Abstract— Henry David Thoreau's philosophy in *Walden*; or, *Life in the Woods* (1971) is to live amidst nature responsibly and become close to one's roots. Ecotourism in contemporary times let people live within nature and connect to it. Thoreau, through *Walden* (1971), proposes certain ideas that closely relate to today's ecotourism. Thoreau and ecotourism talk about immersing with nature, living in a sustainable accommodation, conservation of nature, educational awareness on it, and promoting responsibility towards nature's preservation. This paper is going to analyse this interconnection of ecotourism and Thoreau's ideas in *Walden* (1971). Ecotourism, with its environmental conservation aspect, will be analysed.



Keywords— Ecotourism, Sustainable, Thoreau, Travel, Walden.

Walden (1971) can be taken as a way of life. Thoreau went to live near Walden Pond for two years, two months and two days. This time span taught him certain lessons, and he, in turn, taught the readers certain principles that make absolute meaning in today's scenario. Thoreau lived in nature and became a part of it. In that, he understood nature more than anyone else. He knew the world's coming and he gave ways to preserve nature in its rawest self. In today's time, with climate change, there has been an increased focus on the conservation of nature, even in the field of tourism. Modern-day ecotourism addresses such issues which were raised by Thoreau years back, living in a cabin near Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts. Ecotourism is a niche segment of tourism in natural areas. Fennell described ecotourism as "a sustainable form of natural resource-based tourism that focuses primarily on experiencing and learning about nature...It typically occurs in natural areas, and should contribute to the conservation and preservation of such areas" (Fennell, 43). Its principles are immersive connection with nature by living in a sustainable accommodation, education on nature and an adventure of responsible travelling to relatively undisturbed natural areas. These principles are followed by Thoreau and ecotourism alike, which will be discussed further in the paper. Further, ecotourism is a delicate balance between

environmental conservation, economic development and cultural appreciation. In this paper, ecotourism with the aspect of environmental conservation is taken for analysis. *Walden* (1971) and ecotourism, with their close resemblance, are discussed in this paper.

Immersive Experience with Nature

Thoreau lived amongst nature near Walden Pond. He remarks that he lived in a "lower heaven" (Thoreau, 243) in between nature where wind blows amidst the company of birds. He lived among the wild mice, robin, partridge, cat, loon, phoebe, mud turtles, ducks, hens, raccoons, the wood thrush, the veery, the scarlet tanager, the field sparrow, bees, hawks, wild pigeons, fish hawk, sedge, red birds, cocks, blue-jays, wild geese, and the whippoorwill. In his yard, there were strawberries, blueberries, blackberries and citrus fruits. Thoreau lived amidst the stillness of air and the smoothness of water alongside all the neighbouring species. Thoreau shows nature's goodness from eating food from gardens, gathering wood for the evening fire to picking huckleberries. Thoreau lived an immersive life in nature "in the midst of a young forest of pitch pines and hickories," (Thoreau, 113).

In ecotourism, such an immersive living experience with nature is promoted as well.

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), all nature-based forms of tourism in which the primary motivation of the tourist is the observation and appreciation of nature, is ecotourism. It invites travellers to forge a deeper connection with nature, emphasizing experiences that go beyond conventional tourism. The basic aim is to immerse in nature and live within the natural forest, hills, and nearby river where the boundaries between nature and human is blurred. They can live in the company of different varieties of trees, species of animals, and birds like Thoreau. They can wake up to the call of a rooster and pick their own berries for breakfast.

Living in a Sustainable Accommodation

The style of living that Thoreau adopted in *Walden* (1971) was living in a sustainable accommodation. His house was almost like a part of the natural landscape, with its walls lacking plaster and wide chinks making it porous, obliterating the boundary between human dwelling and the natural world. In the "House-Warming" chapter, Thoreau talks about a room making the best architecture, which warms the house without any essential house-warming materials in it. Thoreau was critical of the many consumerist attitudes his fellow Americans adopted in the 1800s. Margot Wielgus said that Thoreau did not favour his friend's life who tries to get houses, fine clothing, food, shelter and goods that society normatively values (211), which according to him, ultimately leads to hopeless despair for the masses of men. (11). W. Barksdale Maynard wrote on Thoreau's house at Walden, who said that he relocated not to the wilderness but to a recently logged clearing in an intensively used landscape just a minute's walk from town. He created a dwelling in terms of economy, sturdiness and rusticity. He further said that the way Thoreau has situated the structure and descriptions of his arrangements suggests an awareness of specific dictates derived from villa books, as if meant to offer an example of the "villas which will one day be built." (180). His country house recalled several rustic types - summerhouses, hermitages, wilderness retreats etc. Thoreau brought the wilderness values to a suburban location as a part of his desire "to live a primitive and frontier life, though in the midst of an outward civilisation" (Thoreau, 11). Thoreau built his house in a way that there was no yard and unfenced nature reached up to the sills. He believed his home was like a wilderness retreat. In ecotourism, such suburban houses are built within nature for a rustic yet comfortable stay. Rustic houses from the time of *Walden* (1971) are also famously built in today's time like in eco-resorts. One such example of an eco-resort is Jungle Bay Ecolodge, Dominica, which was rated by Forbes as top 10 eco-resorts for environmental and biodiversity protection.

Thoreau got all the materials from nature or from the nearby place where he lived. In ecotourism, a key pillar is the choice of sustainable accommodation. According to Elena et al, "Within the global framework of sustainable development, falls ecotourism". Today's eco-conscious travellers opt for lodgings that prioritise sustainability. Green hotels, eco-friendly resorts and nature-based accommodations practise such energy conservation, waste reduction, and uses locally sourced materials to provide an environmentally responsible stay. Stays within nature also account for sustainable accommodations. Retreat homes are built from trees nearby, while natural products such as bamboo, reclaimed wood and palm fronds for thatched roofs are used for construction. Recycled plastic, glass and even tires are used for the construction of an ecolodge. Ecolodges provide for such experiences in ecotourism. Some examples of such eco lodges around the world are – Volcanoes Safaris in Rwanda and Uganda; Mountain Cabins of Terragna Mountain Hut Italy; Origins Lodge Upala, Costa Rica, where one can hike to a cloud forest and to the active Volcano spotting jaguars, toucans, sloths; Wolwedans Lodge, Namibia where they have a range of camps from Dune, Desert, Mountain View to Boulders; Mara Serena Safari Lodge in Masai Mara, Kenya; Gili Lankanfushi, North Male toll, Maldives; Christalino Lodge, Amazon Rainforest, Brazil with the best birdwatching on the planet with 586 bird species; Tsermang Eco camp-Ladakh with no permanent building materials, etc. Certification programs like EarthCheck, GreenKey and Travelifi can help travellers identify responsible eco-friendly accommodations along the lines of ecotourism. Thoreau also built his cabin using sustainable materials. He marked a reform in domestic architecture. He used deadwood, waterlogged logs, to make an old fence. In building his house, which he compares to building a bird's nest, he used humble log huts and cottages of the poor. He took up an old shanty from an Irish worker, using the boards for his new ones. He built a 10 x 15 foot long and 8-foot ceiling with reclaimed old bricks and boards for dollar 28.12. Similar reclaimed materials are used for eco lodges and eco tourist stays. According to Brown, Thoreau's house would remain a theoretical example for future design. (322).

Thoreau designed his house in today's eco-friendly manners. All were rustic, was an approach that Thoreau repeatedly endorsed. He stopped using wood to not harm the environment and shifted to a stove. He took most of the sun light to use it for every day work. He built his chimney using stones and sand. Many of the ecotourist accommodations with eco-friendly options are provided by Airbnb who took up ecotourism. Unique stays like earthen homes, cave homes, forest stays, cottages, cabins in the midst of nature, campsite rentals, nature eco lodge, tent

homes, dome rentals, beach houses, boat rentals, island rentals, beach front rentals, brings the advantage of living within nature. In Airbnb, all provides such an intimate relaxation home within nature, making them “ecobnb”. Also, these eco lodges are mostly built in the hearts of forests and solar powered resorts are built on remote islands. Some of the examples are an ecolodge in rural Panama featured in architectural magazines, a British Columbian cottage hand sculpted from natural materials, a traditional seaside earthen lodge in Japan, a renewed cave home in Spain, a restored trullo home in Southern Italy, a solar-powered abode dome in the Texas desert and a hobbit cottage in the Costa Rican rainforest.

Thoreau also went to live in Walden Pond to write, to work in a way. It was his “bleisure” trip of two years, a literary retreat. Such homes are also provided in ecotourism. They provide “bleisure” opportunities.

Thoreau advocates for a style of living according to Cafaro, to satisfy his basic needs, avoid luxuries, find happiness in being with nature, preserve nature for future generation. Ecotourism builds along these lines and helps the sector in the present as well as the future. Thoreau’s call for simplicity focuses on slow living movement, minimalism or sustainable living which is what is offered in ecotourism stays. Ecotourism connects with slow tourism and responsible tourism. Slow tourism is characterised by longer, slower, and more spontaneous travel experiences, strong engagement with local culture and environment, and an emphasis on quality over quantity (Guiver & McGrath, 2016). It is a responsible tourism which is anti-commercial, promoting authenticity, advocating for getting to know one small area well, rather than superficial visits to multiple locations. This is a similar philosophy that Thoreau incorporated in *Walden* (1971), by living in Walden Pond and taking every day walking routes in exploring the same place for two years. Slow tourism uses environmentally friendly transport, mostly walking tours across the areas - making it ideal for ecotourism in protected regions.

Conservation and Education

Thoreau believed, in nature, one can learn everything. It is about living a slow, relaxed life in the woods while learning about nature for both Thoreau and the ecotourist. Thoreau talks about coming to the woods for sustenance, recreation and contemplation, participating in the freedom that the natural world provides. Thoreau strongly believed that one should be educated on nature and the surroundings. While living near Walden Pond, he gathers knowledge on different fishes living in the water, like eel, pickerel, shiners, and perch, on whom he conducts an extensive study. He studied even the other ponds nearby like a naturalist. Thoreau also researched at Walden Pond.

He calls the pond “earth’s eye” (186), personifying it and therefore conducting a study of bio-regionalism, an intimate understanding of nature-place. He also thoroughly studied the Walden pond in the winter about the extent of ice in the water. He talks about the perfection in the Walden pond’s position. Thoreau’s love for nature is called “biophilia” by Edward O. Wilson. It talks about an innate affinity of Thoreau to the natural world because of his intense desire to learn about all the living species, their physiologies, life histories and behaviours. This education on nature showed him the significance of conserving it, and he spoke on it. He spoke against cutting of trees for commercial benefits, he was against exploiting the ponds, specially the pond which was named Fleet, on the person who exploited it for commercial gains. He believed that natural objects should be named after one of their natural inhabitants rather than someone who exploits it. He was also against the cutting of ice for commercial reasons, thus becoming a conservationist. According to Peter Barry, Thoreau’s *Walden* (1971) is considered one of “the foundational works of American ‘eco-centred’ writing” (162). Thoreau brings nature and literature together. He criticised deforestation as the hoe woodchoppers decimated the forests that once surrounded the pond, and the Irish immigrants built their sites by it. He said, “How can you expect the birds to sing when their groves are cut down?” (192), providing an ecological viewpoint. He also criticised on the exploitation of some fruits like huckleberries, which were made a market commodity and lost their true flavour. He considered nature as “heaven...under our feet as well as over our heads.” (240).

Walden (1971) and Thoreau is studied under ecocriticism extensively. Lawrence Buell was greatly influenced by Thoreau, who referred to him as “green Thoreau” (12). Buell believed that Thoreau’s *Walden* (1971), could shape the “environmental imagination” by bringing ecological consciousness. He talked about how Thoreau mirrors most closely today’s environmentalist ferment” (115). Philosopher Kate Soper and Andrew Ross talk about the need to persuade people about the significance of ecology. They believed that to safeguard the environment, democratic politicians should take up eco-friendly practices like “ecocriticism” (966-967), a term given by William Rueckert (1978), which advocates for the conservation of the environment. Also, “deep ecology”, coined by Arne Naess (1973), as an ecocritical perspective can be taken to talk about the biocentric worldview in ecotourism, where nature has value independent of its utility to humans. People have no right to destroy it except to meet vital needs. It advocates for changes in our consumption habits while developing an intrinsic, deeper connection with nature (969). Thoreau protected the nature around him,

advocated for vegetarianism, and stopped eating meat. He believed in environmental and animal rights. He educated people based on his days near Walden Pond to respect nature and to follow nature ethics. Ecotourism is a form of such ecocriticism. In ecotourism, conservation efforts are integrated with education on nature and its preservation through various activities. Travellers are offered opportunities to engage in conservation efforts, whether by participating in wildlife monitoring programs or supporting local initiatives. Ecotourism provides for such experiences of educational retreat in informing people of the nearby natural objects and their significance. Education plays a key role, with guided tours and information sessions helping visitors understand the delicate balance of ecosystems and the importance of preserving them.

Ecotourism by itself is at the very core educational, and many things can be learned on the natural environment, flora and fauna. In Pikaia Lodge of the Galapagos Islands, Ecuador, along with ecotourism activities like scuba diving, kayaking, and mountain biking, children are taught biology and conservation. It provides activities of trips to the forest, boat trips, bike rides around the area, diving, snorkelling, safaris around natural reserves, etc., which helps provide information. Local guides accompany at most times and gives a briefing on different species of wildlife and plants living in nature. Sometimes people are taken to untouched areas and made to learn about the significance of the nature there. Travellers can learn about the environment, wildlife and conservation efforts. This education on nature makes people aware of the necessity of conserving it. So, it becomes really beneficial for both the tourists as well as nature. It also helps in improving the quality of the travel experience. Engaging with nature and exploring pristine landscapes while getting educated on it offers a unique adventure. Places like Costa Rica, Bhutan, Kenya, Tanzania, and Iceland has implemented measures for improving the natural landscape and travel experience along such lines. Camping, hiking, bird watching, wildlife spotting, sightseeing tours, are other ways in which tourist are engaged and educated. Thoreau in *Walden* (1971) also went for similar activities throughout his stay. According to Lascurian, an ecolodge also offers tourists an educational and participatory experience, to be able to function in an environmentally sensitive manner, and protect the operating environment (197).

Thoreau, according to Cafaro, tried to build a deep connection with nature, which, he believed, was educational to oneself and would help him to build a closeness to himself (37), thereby helping to explore his transcendental self. Even in ecotourism, it is designed to escape the hustle-bustle of everyday city life and immerse oneself in the tranquillity of natural settings. It has proven to be

therapeutic, educational, giving the space to connect with oneself and, therefore, transcendental.

Adventure with Purpose and Responsible Travelling

Thoreau lived in Walden Pond with a purpose. He took an adventure with the purpose of taking care of the nature around him. He never disturbed its natural course but rather engaged in activities to explore more of it and enjoy it. Ecotourism strives to leave destinations better than it found them. Thoreau teaches to live minimally and calls for simplicity in life. He wants his life to be an example for people that life can be lived sustainably. He advocates for such sustainability in living near Walden Pond. According to Daniel Ogden, Thoreau's *Walden* (1971) is an example of ecotopia, a term coined by Ernest Callenbach in his seminal ecotopian romance, *Ecotopia* (1975). It talks about an ideal society that takes into account the problem of limited resource and tries to create a sustainable economy based on this limitation. This was his adventure with purpose. Nature fulfils one, as emotional and spiritual needs can be met through a direct, non-consumptive, sustainable relationship with nature. He believed that one should see, travel and enjoy whatever nature has to offer and live minimally while doing that. He considered Walden a sacred place. Thoreau urges people to "simplify, simplify" (91). Ecotourism aims to provide such responsible travelling through sustainable solutions as well. Nature is the ultimate teacher, providing the essential facts of life that civilisation obscures. So, one should learn to live sustainably. Thoreau wanted people to live in log huts and cottages which were "picturesque" (44). In ecotourism, homes are built in the shape of huts and cottages where people live to get the authentic notion of sustainable living. Further, Thoreau proposed the notion of living minimally. People in today's time have started to adapt to this minimal living.

According to Cafaro, Thoreau talks about the preservation of the natural environment, thereby raising a 21st century ecological concern (29). Thoreau promoted water, forest, and natural resource preservation. Thoreau advocated for fully preserving semi-wild areas, which are in today's time taken to create tourism spots with retreat homes. He supported minimum displacement of wild nature (Cafaro, 47). This he teaches to the future sustainable tourism sector building. He advocated for the preservation of wild nature and the wise use of natural resources. Thoreau talked about how a park or a primitive forest near each town must be preserved. He talked about protecting the "old-growth forests, where native species reside" (Cafaro, 52). This is something that makes Thoreau an inspirational leader in the ecotourism sector, who aims to provide tourism facilities while preserving the natural environment.

As we collectively move towards a more sustainable future, world travellers seek more responsible travel to natural areas with better environmental and cultural understanding. Ecotourism in today's time also raises this concern, therefore, popularising responsible travelling. Because of that, there are new implementations of international environmental certifications and the integration of smart technologies in ecotourism. Such ecotourism strategies are taken up to address environmental issues. Ecotourism helps in the preservation of natural environments. Travellers are educated on ethical behaviour, ensuring that their presence does not disrupt the delicate balance of the natural ecosystem. From trekking through lush rainforests to exploring underwater ecosystems, travellers can still indulge in thrilling activities while contributing to conservation efforts. Ecotourism doesn't compromise on adventure but creates conscious travellers. Such ecotourism practices educate the local tourist about the wild life and the local area, of the biological diversity. It provides first hand experiences in nature from staying in an ecolodge in the jungle to bird watching. It demonstrates sustainable tourism practices, creating responsible tourists. According to Kostilnikova, Ecotourism aligns with soft tourism values, including low-carbon travel, environmental sensitivity, longer stays, slower travel, immersive experiences, and local involvement for conserving nature. Further, Airbnb provides ecotourism activities for example- an afternoon in a jungle nursery with the Free Tree Society in Kuala Lumpur, Kayak with penguins in Cape Town, tour an urban farm in Sydney, search for wild dolphins off the coast of Maui, explore the lush forests outside Havana, help restore coral reefs in Bali and support the London Wildlife Trust at intimate concerts in London. Bhutan, as of December 2023, has unveiled a plan for building a sustainable Gelephu Mindfulness City (GMC). According to Lotay Thsering, the governor of GMC city, it will be a state within a state with numerous towns and streams, all connected by bridges, where the river will flow beneath an airport without causing any disturbance to the fishes. It is a city in harmony with nature, which will bring in tourists and teach them to live and travel responsibly.

CONCLUSION

In criticism, ecotourism has a chance of human-animal conflict with people disturbing the natural habitat and living conditions of the biosphere. Many businesses, for profit and popularity, claim themselves to be eco-friendly; therefore, comes an inevitable potential for the deceptive practice of "greenwashing", where businesses falsely claim to be environment friendly. However, despite this, ecotourism is a great approach for the preservation of the

planet while exploring its gems. It positively influences the tourism industry towards adopting ecological sustainability, therefore, bettering the world we live in.

According to Wielgus, Thoreau was an early ecologist, early conservationist who showed how to live a balanced life, therefore showing its significance even in today's time. *Walden* (1971), is an eco-friendly guidebook that aligns well with the concepts of ecotourism. Therefore, both cooperate with each other in presenting an ecological point of view. Thoreau through *Walden* (1971), showed himself as a visionary, and ecotourism showed the creation of environmental consciousness and responsibility for the only place where living beings thrive. It is an interesting cross disciplinary study of analysing both the contexts in a world that ever longs for its protection and preservation. *Walden* (1971) provides a framework for future sustainable living and ecotourism implements that in the real world, real time for living travelling responsibly.

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Shiva and Human Dignity in Artificial Intelligence: A Post-Humanistic approach

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Abstract— This paper explores how the ethical and philosophical principles guiding Artificial Intelligence (AI) can be grounded in the spiritual and moral framework of Shiva's humanism. Drawing from the *Śiva Purāṇa* (trans. Shastri, 1970) and the humanistic philosophies of Sri Aurobindo, Swami Vivekananda, and Deendayal Upadhyaya, the study examines how consciousness, compassion, and detachment—core tenets of Śiva's persona—can serve as ethical anchors in the age of intelligent machines. Modern AI ethics emphasizes fairness, transparency, accountability, and human autonomy, yet often lacks a cohesive philosophical anthropology to define what it means to act, know, and value. By integrating Shiva's vision of divine-human unity with Integral Humanism, the paper proposes a spiritually informed model of “ethical intelligence” rooted in awareness, universal compassion, and moral equilibrium. Through this framework, AI is re-conceptualized not merely as a technological tool but as a moral extension of human consciousness, capable of reflecting dharmic values that sustain collective welfare and ecological harmony. Shiva's acts exemplify compassionate rationality that transcends rigid utilitarianism. This study argues that grounding AI development in Shiva's humanism transforms algorithmic governance from procedural compliance into reflective moral action, ensuring that artificial systems uphold dignity, justice, and spiritual evolution. By aligning technological progress with the cosmic ethics of interconnectedness and balance, the paper concludes that Shiva's humanism offers a transformative paradigm for reuniting intelligence and empathy in the digital age.



Keywords— *Śiva Purāṇa*, humanism, Artificial Intelligence ethics, Integral Humanism, compassion, consciousness, dharma, moral technology

I. INTRODUCTION

Humanism has developed across major civilizations, though its interpretation varies, since “humanism is a word with a very complex history and an unusually wide range of possible meanings and contexts ...” (Davies, 1997, p. 2). While early human-centered ideas emerged in ancient Greece and *Vedic* India, humanism became a formally recognized philosophy during the European Enlightenment. In Greece, Protagoras shifted value and ethics away from divine authority by asserting that “Man is the measure of all things, of the reality of those

which are, and the unreality of those which are not” (Quoted in Law, 2011, p. 10), followed by Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Epicurus who further emphasized rational self-development and human well-being (Lamont, 1997; Law, 2011, p. 12). Roman thinkers such as Cicero and Seneca expanded secular ethical inquiry, the latter claiming religion serves different purposes for different groups: “Religion is recognized by common people as true, by the wise as false, and by the rulers as useful” (Quoted in Law, 2011, p. 14). During the Renaissance, figures such as Dante, Petrarch—“the father of humanism” (Cartwright,

2020)—and Boccaccio revived classical learning (Mann, 1996, pp. 1–2; Copson, 2015), followed in England by Chaucer, who approached life from “a truly human point of view” (Arnold, 1888, p. 28), along with Shakespeare, Marlowe, and Bacon. Scientific thinkers like Copernicus and Galileo then advanced rational inquiry, paving the way for Enlightenment humanism, which Kant defined as the “emergence of man from his self-imposed infancy” (Kant, 1784). In later centuries, secular humanism expanded through scientific developments and critiques of religion by Darwin, Feuerbach, Marx, and Nietzsche (Law, 2011, p. 22), leading to organized movements such as the American Humanist Association (Hardie, 2000).

Limiting humanism to Western traditions overlooks the profound human-centered philosophy of ancient India. Unlike the Western secular view, *Vedic* thought placed humans in harmony with God, nature, and spirit. *Vedic* Humanism emphasizes holistic growth by integrating material and spiritual dimensions, since Western concepts “could not do enough to build a cohesive order for the holistic development of self and humanity” (Vedlankar, 2021, p. 352). Rooted in the *Vedas* and *Upaniṣads*, it views the human as inherently divine, with the *Ātman* united to *Brahman*. The *Bhagavad Gita* supports a humanism of spiritual harmony and ethical living, grounding its value in the eternal nature of the Self: “the moral value of humanism depends on integrity or perfect harmony...” and the Self as “unchangeable... eternal... primeval” (*Gita* 2/20–25; Rao, 2022, pp. 123–145). Principles like *ṛta*, *dharma*, compassion, and *vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam* express its universal, ecological ethos. Thinkers such as Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Tagore, and Gandhi adapted this integrated view to ethical and social life, while M. N. Roy turned toward secular humanism (Singh, *Selections from the Radical Humanist*). Thus, *Vedic* Humanism upholds spiritually grounded human dignity, affirming that unity with the divine Self enables true human flourishing. Integral Humanism, derived from *Vedic* Humanism, offers a holistic vision uniting physical, mental, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions. Deendayal Upadhyaya viewed the universe as an interconnected whole where human, society, and nature form a single system. Drawing on *Karma*, *Bhakti*, and *Jñāna Yoga*, he emphasized progress through balance between spiritual and material development. Rejecting compartmentalized thinking, Integral Humanism promotes harmony across self, family, society, nation, and nature, offering an inclusive path where material advancement and spiritual fulfilment coexist.

While traditional humanism centres the human as the measure of all value, post-humanism extends and critiques this idea by decentring the human, emphasizing

interconnected existence among humans, nature, and technology. Today, humanism continues to advocate for dignity, equality, and scientific progress, rejecting supernaturalism since “the ability of the God to interfere at will with nature fatally disrupts the assumptions of naturalism” (Copson, 2015, p. 1). Post-humanism represents a significant philosophical development that questions the centrality of the human subject as conceived in traditional humanism. Emerging in the late 20th century, it challenges the Enlightenment ideal of the autonomous, rational, and self-sufficient individual, proposing instead a view of existence that is decentred, relational, and technologically entangled. Post-humanist thought emphasizes that humans are no longer distinct from or superior to nature, animals, or machines; rather, they are part of an evolving network of interdependent systems (Braidotti, 2013). As a response to anthropocentrism, post-humanism interrogates the limits of humanism’s faith in reason and progress, particularly in light of ecological crises, digital transformation, and biotechnological advancements (Ferrando, 2019). According to Hayles (1999), post-humanism arises from the realization that “information” has begun to replace “embodiment” as the dominant framework for understanding life and consciousness in the information age. This shift implies that identity, agency, and even consciousness may extend beyond the boundaries of the biological human body.

Philosophers such as Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti have been central to shaping post-humanist discourse. Haraway’s *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1991) introduced the concept of the cyborg—a hybrid of organism and machine—as a metaphor for transcending fixed binaries such as human/machine, male/female, and natural/artificial. The cyborg represents a rejection of essentialism and an embrace of multiplicity and hybridity (Haraway, 1991). Braidotti (2013) expands this vision by presenting the Posthuman as an affirmative, ethical subject who exists within complex networks of life, matter, and technology. For Braidotti, post-humanism is not anti-human but rather post-anthropocentric—it calls for a redefinition of humanity within planetary and technological contexts. Similarly, Wolfe (2010) argues that post-humanism marks a “new humanism” that acknowledges humans as one species among many, embedded in material and ecological processes rather than standing apart from them.

Post-humanism also has deep implications for ethics, artificial intelligence, and spirituality. As AI and biotechnology increasingly blur distinctions between human and machine, post-humanism invites reconsideration of what constitutes consciousness, agency, and moral responsibility (Ferrando, 2019). The post-

human condition therefore becomes a site of both possibility and peril: while it challenges exclusionary humanist hierarchies, it also risks undermining notions of human dignity if reduced to technological determinism. Scholars such as Badmington (2004) and Gane (2006) stress that post-humanism must maintain an ethical vigilance—acknowledging technological integration while still upholding respect for sentient existence. In this sense, post-humanism can complement spiritual and ecological philosophies, such as *Vedic* humanism and the *Shiva* paradigm, by recognizing interdependence, impermanence, and the sacred continuum of all life. Rather than rejecting the human, post-humanism invites a deeper humility, urging humanity to see itself as part of an interconnected web of beings, systems, and consciousness.

1.1 *Shiva's* Humanism: A Divine Reflection of Human Values

Shiva, the most complex deity of the Hindu pantheon, embodies an extraordinary synthesis of divine transcendence and human immanence. He represents not only cosmic consciousness but also a deeply compassionate, emotionally responsive being whose experiences mirror the moral and existential struggles of humankind. Through his multiple roles—ascetic, householder, creator, destroyer, and teacher—*Shiva* illustrates how divinity and humanity can coexist within the same being. The *Śiva Purāṇa* presents him not as a remote, impersonal God, but as a figure who feels, loves, suffers, forgives, and instructs; this makes him an emblem of a humanistic divinity (Shastri, 1970, pp. 412–416). *Shiva's* humanism, therefore, rests upon his embodiment of universal values—compassion (*karuna*), wisdom (*jnana*), justice (*dharma*), and detachment (*vairagya*)—through which he elevates both the spiritual and social dimensions of human life.

Philosophically, *Shiva's* humanism integrates divine ontology with ethical anthropology. The *Śiva Purāṇa* repeatedly affirms that all beings share *Shiva's* essence—“*Siva* is present in all creatures as consciousness” (Shastri, 1970, p. 89)—a statement that collapses the divide between the human and the divine. This ontological unity provides the foundation for human dignity in Hindu thought: to recognize the divine within oneself and others is the truest form of humanism. As Sri Aurobindo observes, the purpose of human existence is to manifest the divine in the material world; in *Shiva*, that divine descent is already realized in living form. For Aurobindo, such a realization is integral humanism “an evolution of consciousness that reconciles matter and spirit, the individual and the universal” (1997, pp. 242–245). *Shiva* thus becomes a metaphysical archetype of what

Aurobindo calls the “divine life in humanity,” where spiritual liberation is inseparable from compassion toward all beings.

Shiva's humanistic nature is revealed most powerfully through his emotions. His capacity for *karuna* (compassion) distinguishes him as the divine protector of the oppressed. *Shiva's* compassion through episodes like: *Shiva* granting *moksha* to *Andhaka* (the blinded *asura* representing ignorance), forgiving *Brahma* despite transgression, accepting poison (*halahala*) during *Samudra Manthana* (churning of the ocean), and restoring *Kama* after burning him to ashes. This act of mercy toward even the wicked reflects a moral inclusivity rare in early mythologies. Similarly, when he accepts the poison (*halahala*) churned from the cosmic ocean to save all beings from destruction, he displays the self-sacrificing dimension of humanistic ethics—a readiness to bear suffering for the good of others (Shastri, 1970, pp. 320–322). Swami Vivekananda interprets this act as the supreme expression of divine altruism: “*Siva* drank the poison of the world, yet remained tranquil, for he is the eternal *Yogi* who suffers to redeem others” (1993, p. 114). Such actions translate metaphysical ideals into moral exemplars, showing that the highest divinity operates through empathy, not dominance.

Shiva's grief also manifests his human side. When his consort *Sati* immolates herself at *Daksha's* sacrifice, *Shiva's* response is not detached transcendence but profound sorrow. The *Śiva Purāṇa* describes him carrying *Sati's* lifeless body across the cosmos, weeping until *Vishnu* intervenes (Shastri, 1970, p. 523). His pain reveals that even the cosmic consciousness participates in the emotional depths of love and loss. Radhakrishnan interprets such myths as metaphors for divine participation in the human condition: “The gods are not aloof spectators; they share in the travail of the soul's evolution” (1953 p. 211). In this sense, *Shiva's* mourning is not weakness but empathy the divine acknowledgment of human suffering as sacred. Equally significant is *Shiva's* anger, which serves a restorative rather than destructive purpose. When he incinerates *Kama*, the god of desire, for disturbing his meditation, the act symbolizes the purification of mind from uncontrolled passion (Shastri, 1970, pp. 355–357). Later, upon realizing the cosmic necessity of love, he restores *Kama* to life, thus integrating passion with purpose. This balance embodies what Aurobindo (1997) terms “transformative anger”—a disciplined energy directed toward higher harmony. In humanistic terms, *Shiva's* wrath becomes an ethical metaphor for self-mastery and moral reform, reminding humanity that destruction, when guided by wisdom, leads to renewal.

Shiva's vairagya (detachment) complements his compassion. His ascetic discipline does not signify rejection of the world but mastery over attachment. By renouncing pleasure while upholding responsibility—as husband to *Parvati* and father to *Kartikeya* and *Ganesha*—*Shiva* exemplifies the possibility of balance between renunciation and engagement. Mircea Eliade (1975) interprets *Shiva's* yogic stillness as the “coincidence of opposites,” where absolute transcendence coexists with worldly presence (p. 105). This harmony between the spiritual and the material reflects what Indian humanism upholds as the integral development of self. For Vivekananda, *Shiva* as the “Adiyogi” teaches that self-realization is the highest service to humanity because through inner liberation one radiates compassion outward (1993, p. 87). Thus, detachment in *Shiva's* context becomes the inner condition that sustains ethical action, not its negation.

Shiva's humanism extends to his role as *guru*—the cosmic teacher who imparts wisdom for the moral upliftment of humanity. His discourse to *Parvati* on *yoga*, devotion, and moral order forms the didactic heart of the *Śiva Purāṇa*. In these dialogues, he instructs that true liberation (*moksha*) arises not from ritualism but from the purification of intention and the realization of oneness with all beings (Shastri, 1970, pp. 602–605). This message aligns with the Upanishadic insight that knowledge and compassion are inseparable: to know Brahman is to love creation. Sri Aurobindo (1997) echoes this when he writes that “divine knowledge is not a withdrawal but a transformation of life” (p. 244). The Shaivite ideal of the *jivanmukta*—the liberated being who remains active in the world—encapsulates this synthesis of wisdom and service, making *Shiva* the archetype of ethical and spiritual humanism.

From a philosophical standpoint, *Shiva's* humanism resonates with both Vedic and Integral Humanism. Deendayal Upadhyaya (1965) envisioned human progress as the integration of body, mind, intellect, and soul, asserting that the individual, society, and cosmos form one living organism (pp. 28–30). *Shiva* embodies precisely this integrative model: his cosmic dance (*tanḍava*) symbolizes perpetual creation and destruction as interdependent processes sustaining universal balance. The *Nataraja* image—*Shiva* dancing within a circle of flames—represents both the dynamic rhythm of existence and the potential for spiritual awakening within motion (Eliade, 1975, p. 111). In humanistic interpretation, the dance reveals that destruction is not annihilation but transformation; it is through change and loss that life renews itself. Hence, *Shiva's* humanism is not sentimental

but ontological—it redefines existence as a sacred interplay between creation, preservation, and dissolution.

Ultimately, *Shiva's* humanism rests upon the recognition that divinity is accessible through human experience. His life in the *Puranas* illustrates that spiritual perfection does not negate emotion, family, or society; it sanctifies them. Through compassion, self-discipline, and cosmic awareness, *Shiva* bridges the divide between transcendence and immanence, teaching that human fulfilment lies not in escaping the world but in transforming it through love and knowledge. As Aurobindo (1997) affirms, “The Divine does not flee from life; He manifests Himself in life” (p. 249). In *Shiva*, we find that manifestation perfected—a divine paradigm of humanism that continues to inspire ethical, spiritual, and social renewal.

1.2 Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its Philosophy

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to the scientific and technological effort to create machines capable of performing cognitive tasks traditionally associated with human intelligence, such as reasoning, learning, perception, and problem-solving (Russell & Norvig, 2021). The field was formally established in 1956 at the Dartmouth Conference, where scholars envisioned machines that could “simulate every aspect of learning or any other feature of intelligence” (McCarthy et al., 1956). Since then, AI has evolved through several paradigms from symbolic logic and expert systems to neural networks, machine learning, and deep learning—each attempting to replicate or enhance specific aspects of human cognition (Goodfellow, Bengio, & Courville, 2016). According to Nilsson (2010), AI research operates at the intersection of computer science, cognitive psychology, linguistics, and neuroscience, aiming to understand and reproduce intelligent behaviour. The current era, often described as the age of “narrow AI,” includes applications such as speech recognition, image classification, and natural language processing.

However, researchers like Bostrom (2014) and Tegmark (2017) warn that the pursuit of artificial general intelligence (AGI)—machines with cognitive versatility equal to or surpassing humans—raises profound ethical and existential questions. These include issues of autonomy, consciousness, accountability, and the preservation of human dignity. As AI systems increasingly make decisions affecting human lives, scholars emphasize the importance of aligning machine behaviour with moral, cultural, and spiritual values to ensure technology remains a servant of humanity rather than its rival (Floridi, 2014). In this sense, AI not only represents a technological revolution but also a philosophical challenge, compelling

humanity to reconsider the nature of consciousness, creativity, and moral responsibility in an age of intelligent machines.

The field of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is both technologically rich and philosophically fraught. On one hand, AI denotes systems designed to perform tasks that require human-like cognition—learning, reasoning, perception, language understanding and adaptation (Russell & Norvig, 2021). On the other hand, the philosophy of AI interrogates what it means to “intelligently act”, whether machines can possess consciousness or moral agency, and how human values should govern the design and deployment of AI systems (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2020). Globally, numerous frameworks define principles for responsible AI, highlighting recurring themes such as fairness, transparency, accountability, privacy, autonomy, safety, beneficence, and social wellbeing (CIO Insight Hub, 2022; FPT.AI blog, 2024). Fairness ensures AI does not perpetuate bias or systemic injustice (Klyvoo blog, 2024), while transparency demands systems be explainable to foster trust and accountability (GreenBot, 2023). Accountability assigns clear responsibility to developers and deployers for AI outcomes (Blockchain Council, 2024), and privacy safeguards sensitive personal data (AppliedAIcourse.com, 2024).

Human-centricity remains central—AI should enhance, not undermine, human autonomy. As noted, “Autonomy: Our ability to act freely and independently must be preserved and promoted, while the autonomy of machines must be restricted” (Ethics Unwrapped, n.d.). The twin principles of beneficence and non-maleficence guide AI toward doing good and avoiding harm (CIO Insight Hub, 2022). Emerging models like Saudi Arabia’s “AI Ethics Principles” also stress AI’s role in promoting social and environmental sustainability (SDAIA, 2023). Design-wise, value-sensitive design (VSD) embeds ethical values into systems from the outset (Blockchain Council, 2024; Friedman & Hendry, 2019), while robustness ensures resilience against failures and attacks (GreenBot, 2023). Overall, these principles provide a moral framework to align AI innovation with human dignity, justice, and flourishing.

Beyond ethical principles, a deeper inquiry concerns the nature of intelligence, mind, and agency in artificial systems. The philosophy of AI asks whether intelligence is substrate-independent—that is, whether cognition can exist in non-biological systems. The computation list thesis holds that mental states are computational, so a properly programmed machine could replicate human cognition. Critics, however, argue that

symbol manipulation lacks real understanding or consciousness, as illustrated by John R. Searle’s *Chinese Room Argument* (Searle, 1980). Similarly, David Chalmers distinguishes the “easy problems” of explaining cognition from the “hard problem” of subjective experience or *qualia* (Chalmers, 1996). As AI gains autonomy, questions of moral agency arise: can machines be moral actors, or do responsibility and intentionality remain uniquely human? While some philosophers see artificial moral agency as theoretically possible, most deny machines’ capacity for true intentionality or normative comprehension (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2020). The possibility of Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) or super intelligence intensifies these debates. Nick Bostrom cautions that aligning such systems with human values is “perhaps the greatest challenge of our age” (Bostrom, 2014).

The philosophy of AI also grapples with value alignment: how to ensure that AI systems reflect human values rather than undermine them. This leads to questions about what human values are, how they are selected, and how machines can embed them. For example, the concept of “respect” has recently been proposed as a design lens for AI systems: systems should not only be fair or just, but should treat humans with respect—which is richer than mere non-discrimination because it relates to how humans are perceived and treated (Seymour et al., 2022). These debates connect to older philosophical traditions about autonomy, dignity, moral agency and post-human futures.

1.3 Objective

The intersection of humanism and AI thus becomes a critical site of inquiry: can the dignity and agency of human beings be sustained in an era when machines increasingly mimic or replace human cognitive functions and how might philosophical traditions rooted in humanism respond. Thus, this paper proposes that *Shiva*’s model of humanism offers a uniquely valuable lens through which to evaluate AI’s ethical and ontological implications. *Shiva*, as a deity who embodies both transcendence and immanence, annihilation and regeneration, ascetic renunciation and social engagement, provides a paradigm of humanism that integrates spiritual depth with worldly responsibilities. By exploring *Shiva*’s humanistic qualities the paper demonstrates that how this paradigm helps safeguard human dignity in the face of artificial intelligences that threaten reductionist views of persons as mere information-processors.

II. SHIVA’S HUMANISM IN THE AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Artificial Intelligence, as a transformative force, requires a moral and philosophical grounding that

transcends technical compliance. The core principles of AI ethics—fairness, autonomy, accountability, and dignity—cannot be realized through regulations alone; they must emerge from a deeper understanding of consciousness, compassion, and collective well-being. *Shiva's humanism*, as reflected in the *Śiva Purāṇa* and Indian philosophical traditions, provides precisely such a framework. It offers an integral vision of humanity, where the divine and the human are not separate, but mutually revealing realities. If properly applied, the ethical ideals embodied by *Shiva* can transform the moral architecture of AI from a mechanistic set of procedures into a reflective, human-centered system oriented toward spiritual and social harmony.

In the *Śiva Purāṇa*, consciousness (In Sanskrit, *cit*) is not limited to human cognition but pervades all existence—*Shiva* is both the source and witness of all awareness (Shastri, 1970, pp. 78–80). This worldview aligns with the philosophical need for AI systems to be designed with awareness of the ethical consequences of their operations. Unlike Western anthropocentrism, which separates human reason from machine logic, *Shiva's* conception of consciousness suggests a continuum where intelligence is sacred but must remain anchored in moral awareness. Sri Aurobindo (1997) interprets this consciousness as an evolutionary force that seeks self-expression through matter; hence, technology—including AI—can become an instrument of that evolution only if aligned with compassion and truth (pp. 244–247). In AI development, this translates to the design of *reflective architectures*—systems that are not merely efficient but ethically self-aware. Ethical AI frameworks inspired by *Shiva's* consciousness principle would integrate self-regulating feedback mechanisms that assess not only performance metrics but also social and emotional impacts. For example, when algorithms are used in healthcare or law enforcement, they should be capable of evaluating the human consequences of their recommendations, reflecting the *Shaivite* ideal of awareness coupled with responsibility. As *Shiva* remains the silent witness who perceives without prejudice (Shastri, 1970, p. 312), so must AI systems be trained to observe impartially and act with transparency, avoiding the distortions of bias or hidden data manipulation.

AI's principle of autonomy requires that human freedom, decision-making power and independence be preserved while machine autonomy remains restricted, value-aligned and ethically constrained. This modern view aligns closely with *Shiva's* humanism, where autonomy is expressed through the inner freedom rooted in self-awareness, compassion and alignment with *dharma* (right duty) and *Rta* (cosmic order). *Shiva's* model of autonomy is not ego-centric independence but a balanced self-

governance that harmonises personal action with universal welfare. Integrating this into AI means designing systems that enhance human agency rather than replace or undermine it, ensuring that AI supports human dignity, ethical clarity and self-realisation. *Shiva's* emphasis on responsible freedom implies that autonomy must always operate within moral limits, offering a framework in which AI autonomy remains transparent, accountable and non-harmful. Thus, a *Shiva*-inspired approach places humans at the ethical center, making AI a tool that strengthens human autonomy, promotes right action, and preserves harmony between humans, society and the wider cosmos.

One of *Shiva's* defining humanistic traits is *karuna*—universal compassion that extends even to those who err or oppose him. In the *Śiva Purāṇa*, when *Shiva* grants boon to everyone including demons, he exemplifies the principle that moral worth resides in all beings, regardless of status or imperfection. This inclusivity directly supports AI's principle of fairness and non-discrimination. Just as *Shiva's* compassion transcends hierarchies, equitable AI must transcend data-driven bias by embedding ethical sensitivity into its learning models. Swami Vivekananda saw *Shiva's* compassion as “the ultimate proof of divine realization,” asserting that “he who has seen God in all beings cannot harm any” (1993, p. 89). Applying this insight to AI ethics, compassionate intelligence would mean designing systems that prioritize human dignity over optimization. For instance, AI used in employment or social services must account for contextual vulnerabilities rather than apply cold statistical measures. An AI guided by *karuna* would be programmed to detect and mitigate potential harms, echoing the principle of *ahimsa* (non-violence) central to Indian ethics. Moreover, compassion in *Shaiva* philosophy is not sentimental but transformative—it arises from insight into the unity of life. This perspective can inspire AI researchers and policymakers to shift focus from “efficiency” to “empathy metrics,” evaluating success not only by speed or accuracy but by social harmony and inclusivity. Such a model aligns with the *AI for Social Good* paradigm (GreenBot, 2023), yet enriches it with a spiritual anthropology that recognizes interdependence as a moral truth.

Shiva's detachment (*vairagya*) offers another philosophical grounding for AI governance. In mythic symbolism, *Shiva* remains serene amid cosmic turmoil—his asceticism represents freedom from personal gain or emotional reactivity. When applied to AI, this principle translates into algorithmic impartiality and accountability. A detached intelligence, as envisioned in *Shiva's* example, acts without greed or ego, guided by *dharma* (righteous order). Engineers and developers, therefore, must emulate *Shiva's* detachment in their ethical orientation—ensuring

that AI design remains free from commercial manipulation or political bias. Upadhyaya's concept of *integral humanism* reinforces this view, urging that technological progress should harmonize material, moral, and spiritual dimensions of life (1965, pp. 34–36). Detachment in this context does not imply apathy but disciplined engagement: using AI as a means of service rather than exploitation. Policies informed by this ethos would mandate transparency in data use, ethical audits of AI deployment, and limits on profit-driven manipulation of algorithms. *Shiva's* serene indifference in the face of cosmic dualities models the ideal of stability amid rapid technological change. Just as he maintains balance between destruction and creation through his cosmic dance (*tanḍava*), ethical AI must maintain equilibrium between innovation and moral restraint—destroying harmful practices while creating systems that uplift.

In the age of AI, *Shiva's* manifestations of *Ardhanarishvara* and the *Linga* offer profound symbolic frameworks for guiding the ethical and humanistic evolution of intelligent systems. *Ardhanarishvara* and the *Linga* can symbolically illuminate certain features of AI by offering metaphors that align technology with holistic humanistic principles. *Ardhanarishvara*—representing the integrated harmony of *Shiva* and *Shakti*, consciousness and energy, logic and intuition—can be applied to AI in the sense that truly ethical and effective systems must balance computational rationality with human-centred sensitivity, ensuring that efficiency does not overshadow empathy or moral responsibility. The *Linga*, symbolising unified existence, non-duality, and transcendence of form, can parallel AI's core architecture, which seeks to synthesise vast data into singular, meaningful outputs that support human life. As a metaphor for formless yet purposeful presence, the *Linga* mirrors how AI operates invisibly in the background while shaping tangible actions and decisions. Together, these paradigms suggest that AI should not be designed merely as a tool of isolated intelligence but as a balanced, integrative system that harmonises objective analysis with ethical grounding, supports human flourishing, and respects the unity of diverse human needs. Another manifestation of *Shiva*, *Nataraja* can be meaningfully applied to several features of AI, offering a symbolic framework for responsible and balanced technological development.

Coomaraswamy interprets that “The dance, in fact, represents His five activities (*Pancakritya*), viz: *Srishti* (creation, evolution), *Sthiti* (preservation, support), *Samhara* (destruction, evolution), *Tirodhava* (illusion), *Anugraha* (release, emancipation, grace). These, separately considered, are the activities of the deities Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra, Maheshvara and

Sadashiva. This cosmic activity is the central motif of the dance” (2013, p.55) *Nataraja's* cosmic dance represents rhythm, balance, creation, destruction, and renewal, mirroring how AI systems continuously cycle through learning, updating, correcting, and optimizing. Just as the dance harmonizes opposing forces, AI must balance efficiency with ethics, prediction with correction, and innovation with safety. The suppression of *Durvasa*, the demon of ignorance, reflects AI's role in reducing misinformation, bias, and error, while *Shiva's* flame symbolizes illumination—parallel to how AI reveals patterns and insights hidden within data. The perfect equilibrium between movement and stillness in the dance echoes the need for stability and reliability in AI despite vast complexities, and *Shiva's abhaya mudra* aligns with the principle that AI must be designed with compassion, safety, and human welfare at the centre. Thus, *Nataraja* provides a profound philosophical lens through which AI can be understood as a dynamic yet ethically grounded system that should embody balance, renewal, enlightenment, and humanistic responsibility.

Shiva's humanism transcends individuality, affirming that all beings form part of a single cosmic organism. His teaching of *Vasudhaiva Kuṭumbakam* (the world as one family) is the ethical cornerstone for global AI governance. The interconnected nature of AI systems—spanning borders, cultures, and economies demands an equally integrative ethical framework. *Shiva's* worldview dissolves the dichotomy between self and other, local and universal. This perspective supports the development of international AI ethics charters that emphasize shared accountability and ecological balance. Sri Aurobindo describes this as “unity in diversity,” where technological progress becomes an extension of spiritual evolution (1997 p. 250). Similarly, Radhakrishnan emphasizes that in Indian humanism, the divine expresses itself through service to humanity, for “to serve man is to serve God” (1953 p. 208). Grounding AI ethics in this integrative philosophy means designing policies that value both human welfare and environmental sustainability. AI should not only avoid harm but actively promote societal well-being—enhancing education, healthcare, ecological monitoring, and equitable distribution of resources. In practical terms, this can be realized by embedding *ethical neural architectures* that weigh collective benefit alongside individual autonomy. For example, decision-support systems in governance could be trained to assess long-term social harmony rather than short-term profit. The alignment of AI with *Shiva's* integrative humanism ensures that technology remains an instrument of *ṛta*—cosmic order—rather than *adharma*—moral disorder.

The challenge of modern AI governance lies in bridging normative ethics and metaphysical insight. As you noted, “the principles of AI ethics cannot be effective unless grounded in the philosophical understanding of what it means to act, know, and value.” *Shiva’s* humanism offers precisely this bridge. It defines *action* (*karma*) as the expression of selfless duty, *knowledge* (*jñāna*) as awareness of unity, and *value* (*artha*) as that which upholds harmony. When these elements guide AI, the resulting systems reflect moral intentionality rather than mechanical utility. By internalizing Śiva’s triadic model of consciousness, compassion, and detachment, AI development can evolve from a mechanistic process into a reflective moral enterprise. Engineers and policymakers become *karma-yogis*—ethical actors whose technical actions are grounded in spiritual mindfulness. This integration prevents AI ethics from devolving into “compliance checklists” and reorients it toward authentic ethical awareness. As *Shiva’s* dance sustains creation through rhythm and balance, so must AI sustain the rhythm of society through justice, transparency, and respect for all life.

III. CONCLUSION

Shiva’s persona aligns not only with humanistic values but also meaningfully anticipates post humanist thought by challenging rigid separations between the human, nature, and the cosmic order. His humanism is evident in his compassion for all beings, ascetic self-discipline, ethical responsibility, and deep engagement with human suffering and social marginality. At the same time, *Shiva* moves beyond by affirming the intrinsic value of non-human life—animals, natural elements, and ascetic landscapes—thereby decentring the human as the sole locus of meaning. Rather than asserting human dominance, *Shiva* embodies relational existence, where humans, nature, and the cosmos participate in an interdependent continuum of creation, preservation, and dissolution. In this sense, *Shiva* offers a philosophical model in which humanistic ethics are retained yet expanded into a broader, Posthuman vision of ecological, ontological, and cosmic interconnectedness.

In the contemporary landscape where Artificial Intelligence increasingly shapes human experience, *Shiva’s* humanism offers a profound ethical and philosophical foundation for ensuring that technological progress remains aligned with human dignity, compassion, and cosmic balance. AI may excel in computation and automation, but without a deeper moral anthropology, it risks reducing persons to data points and decisions to mechanistic outputs. The *Śiva Purāṇa*, however, presents

a vision of consciousness rooted in sacred awareness, rationality, and moral responsibility. *Shiva* is portrayed not as a distant deity but as the inner witness, the cosmic teacher, and the compassionate guardian whose actions embody the principles of justice, balance, and universal welfare (Shastri, 1970). When translated into AI ethics, this worldview implies that artificial systems should not merely process information but must do so with accountability, transparency, and respect for the intrinsic worth of all beings.

Shiva’s integration of *cit* (consciousness), *karuna* (compassion), and *vairagya* (detachment) provides a unique triadic model for ethical intelligence. Compassion resists the replication of bias and injustice; detachment cultivates impartiality and guards against exploitative or profit-driven misuse of algorithms; and consciousness promotes reflective awareness of social impacts. As Aurobindo asserts, “true progress occurs when material advancement serves spiritual evolution” (1997, p. 249), a principle that becomes increasingly vital as AI permeates global governance, healthcare, education, and social systems. Similarly, Upadhyaya’s Integral Humanism calls for harmony between the individual, society, and cosmos, reinforcing the idea that technological systems must be designed not simply for efficiency but for the flourishing of the entire human community and the ecological world it inhabits.

Furthermore, *Shiva’s* symbolic manifestations—*Ardhanarishvara*, *Linga*, and *Nataraja*—offer conceptual metaphors for AI’s ethical architecture. *Ardhanarishvara* represents the balanced integration of logic and empathy, mirroring the need for AI to harmonize analytical power with human-centered sensitivity. The *Linga* symbolizes unified and purposeful presence, analogous to the abstract, non-anthropomorphic core of AI systems that operate invisibly yet shape human outcomes. *Nataraja’s* cosmic dance embodies rhythm, corrective transformation, and the dissolution of ignorance, reflecting how AI must continuously evolve through transparent governance, error correction, and commitment to truth. These metaphors reveal that *Shiva’s* humanism is not merely mythological but provides an actionable framework for cultivating responsible, compassionate, and balanced AI.

Ultimately, the convergence of AI ethics with *Shiva’s* humanism gestures toward a transformative paradigm in which technological intelligence is guided by moral intelligence. As Vivekananda reminds us, “He who sees God in all beings, and all beings in God, verily serves the Divine” (1993, p. 89). In this spirit, AI must serve not machines, markets, or narrow interests, but humanity as *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (one interconnected family).

Rooted in *dharma*, compassion, and cosmic order (*rta*), *Shiva's* humanism ensures that future AI systems contribute to justice, harmony, and the spiritual evolution of society. By grounding digital innovation in this ancient yet universally relevant philosophy, we move toward a future where intelligence, human and artificial, works in alignment with the deeper rhythm of life and the sacred dignity of all existence.

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Media Challenges in Developing Countries: Understanding the Rise of Alternative Digital Platforms Over Mainstream Journalism

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Abstract— The article is dedicated to the analysis of structural transformations of journalism in developing countries under conditions of platform dominance and algorithmic governance. The relevance of the study is determined by the accelerated displacement of mainstream journalism by alternative digital platforms in media systems characterized by political pressure, economic fragility, and technological asymmetry. The scientific novelty of the work lies in the integrated examination of algorithmic, economic, legal, and sociocultural factors shaping this displacement within the context of Bangladesh. The article describes the uneven adoption of artificial intelligence tools in newsrooms, the erosion of editorial authority under metric-driven decision-making, and the growing reliance of audiences on non-institutional information actors. Special attention is paid to the interaction between platform algorithms and state regulatory mechanisms that jointly constrain professional journalism while enabling alternative digital actors. The study sets itself the goal of identifying the mechanisms through which editorial judgment is subordinated to algorithmic optimization in developing media environments. To achieve this goal, qualitative source analysis, comparative analysis, and structural interpretation were employed. The conclusions outline the implications of these transformations for media trust, journalistic autonomy, and the sustainability of public discourse. The article will be useful for researchers in media studies, journalism, digital communication, and political communication. The originality of this study resides in its integrated analytical framework that jointly examines algorithmic governance, state regulation, and newsroom economic dependency through an empirically grounded analysis of a developing-country media system, rather than treating these dynamics as separate domains.



Keywords— digital journalism, alternative media, developing countries, algorithmic governance, editorial judgment, platform capitalism, media trust, Bangladesh, artificial intelligence, citizen journalism

I. INTRODUCTION

The uncertainty embedded in that initial encounter with automation—the hesitation between viewing the machine as a tool or as a master—finds a particularly volatile resonance when transposed to the media ecologies of the Global South. In the specific context of Bangladesh and the broader South Asian region, this is not merely a question of workflow optimization or the modernization of legacy newsrooms; it is an epistemological crisis that is

unfolding against a backdrop of severe structural fragility. The "frictions" mentioned are not just operational inefficiencies but are political and existential fractures. We are witnessing a moment where the institutional authority of the "editor"—that historical figure entrusted with the curation of public reality—is being simultaneously eroded by the invisible hand of the platform algorithm and the very visible iron hand of the state [1,2].

The migration of the audience from the printed page and the scheduled broadcast to the chaotic, infinite scroll of the mobile feed is often narrated in development discourse as a story of progress, of "leapfrogging" legacy infrastructure. But this narrative obscures a darker, more complex displacement. In Bangladesh, where the institutionally anchored media have long been beleaguered by censorship, corporate capture, and financial precariousness, the rise of alternative digital platforms does not represent a mere change in consumption habits [3]. It represents a flight from a compromised center. The audience is not just running toward the convenience of the smartphone; they are running away from a mainstream journalism that they increasingly perceive as hollow, sanitized, and structurally incapable of speaking truth to power [4].

This report seeks to map the contours of this displacement. It is an exploration that must necessarily drift between the technical specificities of algorithmic sorting and the visceral realities of street-level reporting in Dhaka. The goal here is to understand how the "platform logic" of entities like Facebook and YouTube—designed in Silicon Valley to maximize engagement—intersects with the political logic of a developing state designed to minimize dissent [5]. We are looking for the precise points of tension where the "editorial judgment" of the human journalist is overruled by the "probabilistic optimization" of the machine, and how this surrender of authority has opened the door for a new, unruly, and often untrustworthy class of information actors.

Three loose analytical objectives guide this inquiry, though they will bleed into one another as the reasoning unfolds. First, we must attempt to dissect the specific technological failures—the "language gaps" and "algorithmic biases"—that render Western-designed AI tools inadequate for the Bengali information ecosystem, creating a vacuum where misinformation thrives. Second, we need to trace the economic collapse of the traditional newsroom, examining how the desperate reliance on "metrics" has forced editors to internalize the logic of the click-farm, thereby destroying the very credibility that was their only asset. And third, we will look at the sociological phenomenon of the "citizen journalist" and the "influencer" who has stepped into this breach, offering a form of "raw" news that is technically inferior but perceived as authentically resistant to the status quo.

II. METHODS AND MATERIALS

This section outlines the empirical and theoretical materials used in the study and the methodological approaches applied for their analysis.

The study by Kotenidis [1] was used to conceptualize the functional scope and limitations of algorithmic journalism, providing a framework for understanding automated content production and recommendation systems. The work of Moran and Shaikh [2] informed the analysis of meta-journalistic discourse surrounding artificial intelligence and its perceived impact on professional norms. The research by Riaz [3] was employed to examine the legal and political environment of journalism in Bangladesh, particularly mechanisms of self-censorship induced by regulatory pressure. The study by Tabassum and Islam [4] was used to analyze audience trust dynamics and perceptions of mainstream versus alternative media among young users. The work of Moyo et al. [5] contributed to the examination of analytics-driven newsroom practices and the transformation of editorial decision-making. Reports by Financial Express [6] were used to assess shifts in advertising revenue and their implications for media sustainability. The study by Shyam [7] supported the discussion of structural challenges facing journalism in digital media enterprises. The research by Simons et al. [8] was used to analyze practices of citizen journalism and community participation during periods of political unrest.

Methodologically, the article employed qualitative source analysis, comparative analysis of media practices, and structural-institutional interpretation to identify patterns of interaction between algorithms, economic incentives, and regulatory constraints in developing media systems.

III. RESULTS

The investigation into the displacement of mainstream journalism in Bangladesh reveals a landscape that is less a coherent market transition and more a series of violent ruptures—technological, financial, and ethical. The data does not point to a smooth integration of AI and digital tools, but rather to a jagged adoption process where the tools of automation often work at cross-purposes with the values of journalism [1]. In the chaotic noise of the Bangladeshi digital sphere, the "signal" of professional news is being drowned out not just by volume, but by a fundamental misalignment between what the algorithms value and what the public requires (Figure 1) [6].

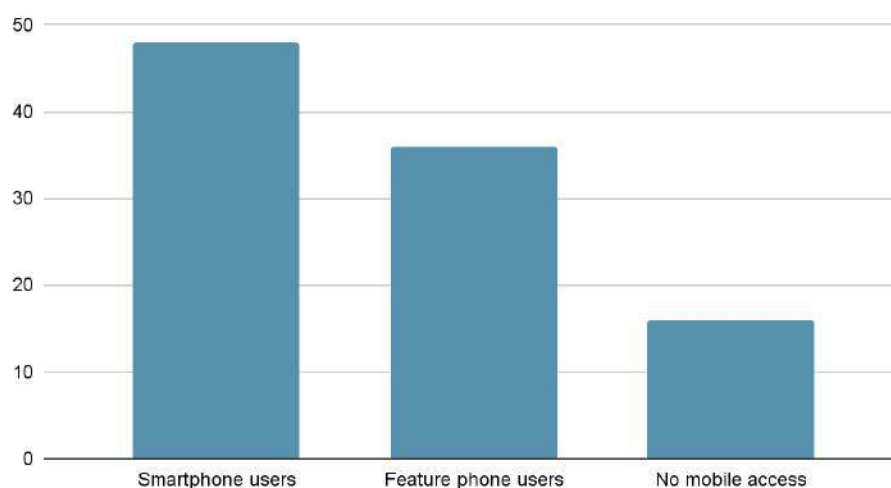


Fig.1. Distribution of mobile access types in developing economies, % (compiled by the author based on [6])

This misalignment is rooted not only in algorithmic design, but in the material conditions through which digital news consumption is mediated.

When we speak of AI in the newsroom, we are often imagining the high-functioning, glossy implementations seen in the Global North—generative summaries, automated financial reporting, sophisticated recommendation engines. In the context of Bangladesh, the reality of "algorithmic journalism" is far grittier and defined more by what the systems cannot do than what they can. The "classes" of AI systems operating here can be broadly categorized into three buckets, each failing in its own distinct way to support the localized needs of the newsroom.

First, there is the Curatorial AI, the recommendation algorithms of the major platforms (Facebook, YouTube, TikTok), which function as the primary gatekeepers of news for the Bangladeshi population. These systems operate on a logic of "engagement maximization" that is profoundly culturally blind. The metrics that drive visibility—comments, shares, reaction emojis—do not distinguish between a verified investigative report and a piece of incendiary hate speech. In a linguistic environment like Bengali, which is considered a "low-resource language" in the hierarchy of Natural Language Processing (NLP), these systems lack the semantic nuance to filter content effectively. They are blunt instruments. They amplify outrage because outrage is a universal signal of engagement, while the subtleties of political satire or nuanced editorial critique—which rely on deep cultural context—are flattened or ignored. The algorithm sees "activity," not "meaning."

Second, we have the Generative and Assistive AI tools—the translation bots, the automated transcription services, and the content drafters. Here, the "breakdown" is

technical and linguistic. The available NLP models for Bengali are significantly less robust than their English counterparts. They struggle with dialects, with the specific "Banglish" (a mix of Bengali and English script) used by the youth on social media, and with the complex grammatical structures of formal Bengali journalism. A newsroom attempting to use an automated translation tool to convert international wire copy into Bengali often finds the output riddled with errors that require more time to fix than manual translation would have taken. The promise of efficiency turns into a bottleneck of correction. The "human-in-the-loop" here is not a supervisor but a mechanic, constantly fixing the broken output of the machine.

Third, and perhaps most insidious, is the Predictive/Metric AI—the analytics dashboards (Google Analytics, Chartbeat, Crowdtangle) that have been installed in every digital newsroom in Dhaka. These systems function perfectly well on a technical level; they count clicks and track eyeballs with ruthless precision. The failure here is not in the software, but in the application of its logic. In a financially starving media market, these predictive tools have been elevated from "diagnostic instruments" to "editorial dictators". They do not just measure the news; they shape it. If the dashboard predicts that a story about a celebrity scandal will generate 100,000 hits while a report on rural water sanitation will generate 500, the resource-strapped newsroom—operating on thin margins and dependent on programmatic ad revenue—has little choice but to pivot. The "class" of AI that has the most impact is the one that tells the editor what not to cover.

This friction is not theoretical. It manifests in the daily operations of the newsroom as a form of paralysis. The editor knows that the "important" story will fail the

algorithmic test. The "trivial" story will pass. The tension between "editorial worth" and "algorithmic value" is resolved, increasingly, in favor of the algorithm. This is not because the journalists lack integrity, but because the infrastructure of distribution—the platform—has successfully monetized distraction over information.

The collapse of editorial authority is not solely a function of technological incapacity. The systematization of interacting pressures shaping editorial displacement is presented below (Figure 2).

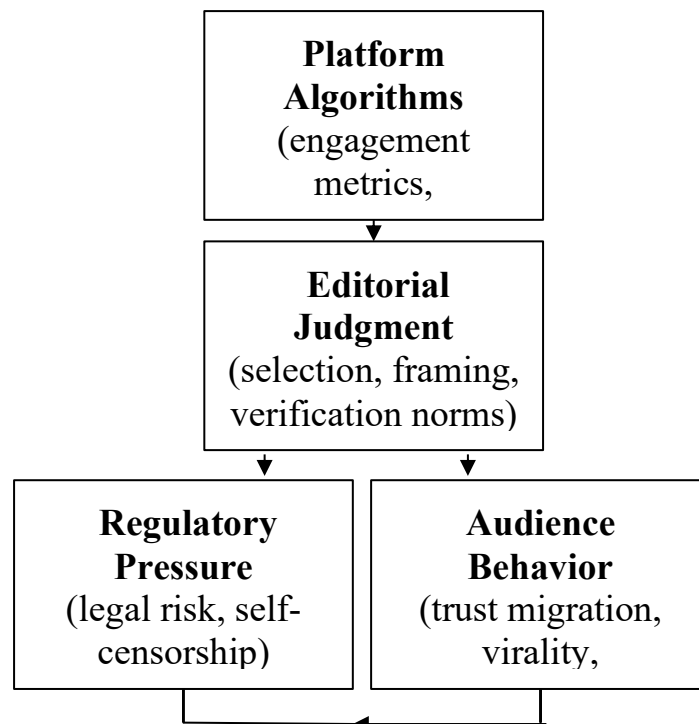


Fig.2. Structural interaction between platform algorithms, regulation, editorial judgment, and audience behavior (compiled by the author based on [1,2,3,5])

The interactional logic outlined above does not operate as a series of isolated influences but crystallizes into a stable structural configuration at the institutional level. Once algorithmic prioritization, regulatory constraint, and audience reorientation begin to reinforce one another, newsroom practices are gradually reorganized around survival rather than editorial deliberation. This reorganization is expressed not only in content choices but in revenue strategies, ownership dependencies,

infrastructural vulnerabilities, and patterns of self-censorship. Over time, these pressures cease to function as external constraints and become embedded features of the media organization itself, shaping its operational horizon and limiting its capacity for autonomous agenda-setting. This erosion follows a patterned configuration in which economic dependency, regulatory pressure, and infrastructural asymmetry reinforce each other (Table 1).

Table 1. Structural configuration of media decline in developing countries (compiled by the author based on [1,5,7])

Dimension	Dominant Condition	Institutional Consequence
Revenue model	Platform-centered advertising	Weakening of newsroom autonomy
Ownership structure	Political or oligarchic alignment	Editorial agenda distortion
Regulatory environment	Legal uncertainty and selective enforcement	Expansion of self-censorship
Infrastructure control	State leverage over connectivity	Disruption of information flows
Market position	Dependence on global platforms	Loss of agenda-setting capacity

It is deeply entangled with the legal and political architecture of the state. In Bangladesh, the "constraint" is often a euphemism for the threat of incarceration. The

Digital Security Act (DSA) and its successor, the Cyber Security Act (CSA), function as a manual override to the freedom of the press, creating a climate of self-censorship

that the alternative platforms are better positioned to exploit [3].

The breakdown occurs at the intersection of "state surveillance" and "corporate compliance." Mainstream news outlets, with their physical offices, registered licenses, and identifiable staff, are "soft targets" for regulation. If a newspaper publishes a report that displeases the ruling dispensation, the editors can be summoned, the journalists arrested, and the advertising streams cut off by state-influenced corporate sponsors. The "editorial judgment" in these newsrooms is thus perpetually heavily compromised by a survival instinct. They must filter their own content before it even reaches the algorithm.

In contrast, the alternative digital ecosystem—the constellation of anonymous Facebook pages, expatriate YouTubers, and loose networks of citizen journalists—operates with a degree of "sovereign agility." They are harder to pin down. A Facebook page run from an encrypted connection or from outside the country faces no immediate threat of a raid [8]. Consequently, they can publish the stories that the mainstream ignores. They can stream the protests live while the TV cameras are forced to turn away.

This dynamic creates a peculiar "trust paradox." The audience, aware that the mainstream media is censored, begins to view the "unverified" nature of alternative platforms not as a flaw, but as a badge of honor. The grainy, shaky video footage of a crackdown, uploaded by an anonymous user, is perceived as "raw truth" precisely because it lacks the polish of the professional newsroom. The lack of editorial filtering—which in a healthy ecosystem would be a liability—becomes a signal of authenticity in a censored one. The "breakdown" of professional standards becomes a selling point.

However, this creates a dangerous fragility. Because these alternative platforms lack the resources for verification, they are also the primary vectors for misinformation. The "constraint" of the mainstream leads to the "chaos" of the alternative. We see this in the rapid spread of rumors during times of crisis—communal tensions inflamed by a single viral post, political unrest exacerbated by doctored images. The audience, hungry for the news they

cannot get from the papers, swallows the poison along with the medicine.

The financial constraints are equally devastating. The shift of advertising revenue from local media houses to global tech giants (Google and Meta) has hollowed out the investigative capacity of the Bangladeshi press. Journalism is expensive; rumors are free. The "production-scale usage scenario" for a typical online news portal in Dhaka involves a skeleton crew of underpaid reporters churning out dozens of rewritten copy-paste articles a day just to keep the "feed" moving. There is no time for deep verification, no budget for long-form reporting. The system is designed for speed, not depth. This economic anorexia makes the newsroom reliant on "wire copy" and press releases, further degrading their unique value proposition.

To understand the texture of this shift, one must look at the specific production scenarios where human judgment collides with the machine. Consider the role of the "Social Media Editor" in a mid-sized Dhaka daily. This individual, often younger and more tech-literate than the Editor-in-Chief, sits at the nexus of the conflict. Their job is to take the journalism produced by the newsroom and "package" it for the platform.

The friction here is palpable. The reporter submits a nuanced 800-word piece on the complexities of the national budget. The Social Media Editor knows, based on the analytics of the past week, that this headline will die on Facebook. They rewrite it. "Budget Analysis" becomes "Shocking Price Hikes: What You Need to Know." The thumbnail is changed from a graph to a picture of an angry shopper. The "editorial judgment" of the reporter—who wanted to convey complexity—is overridden by the "algorithmic judgment" of the editor—who needs to secure traffic.

This is a form of "re-scripting" where the logic of the platform actively rewrites the logic of journalism. It is not just about headlines. It affects the assignment desk. "Trending topics" derived from Google Trends or Twitter lists often dictate the morning meeting agenda. If a topic is trending, it must be covered, regardless of its inherent news value. The algorithm sets the agenda; the journalist merely fills it (Figure 3).

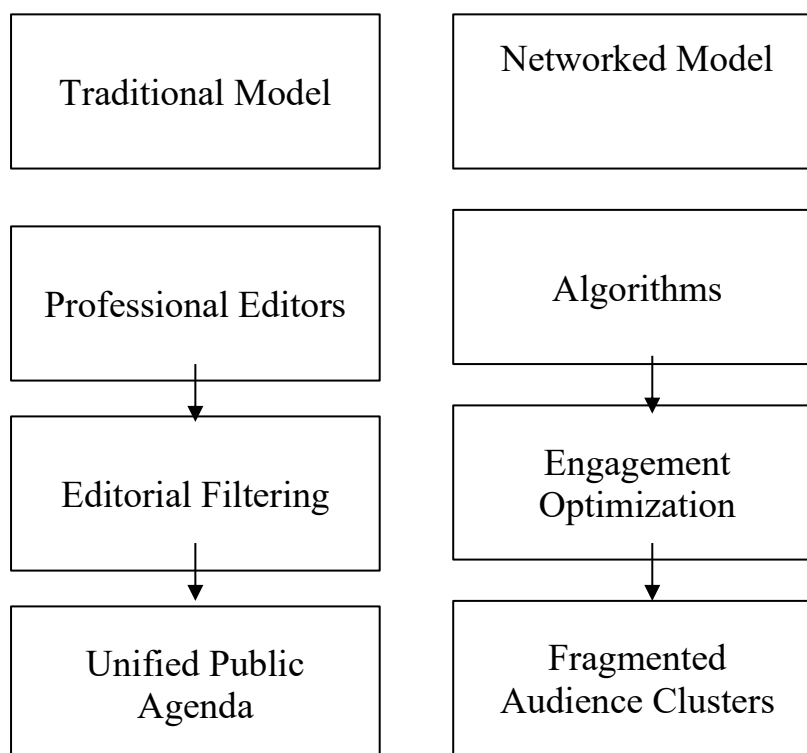


Fig.3. Transformation of gatekeeping mechanisms in the Global South media system (compiled by the author based on [2])

In more advanced scenarios, we see the use of "A/B testing" for headlines and images. The newsroom software automatically serves two different headlines to different segments of the audience. The one that gets more clicks after 15 minutes becomes the permanent headline. Here, the "editor" has effectively abdicated the decision entirely. The audience—or rather, the audience's impulsive clicking behavior—decides the framing of the story. In a polarized society, the headline that wins is almost always the one that confirms bias or incites anger. The system automates polarization.

We also see the emergence of "shadow workflows" where journalists use personal WhatsApp groups to circulate stories that their own editors refuse to publish. These "dark social" networks function as an underground railroad for information, bypassing both the state censor and the commercial algorithm. A reporter might leak their own findings to a popular Facebook activist, knowing that the activist can publish it without fear. The journalist becomes a source for the influencer. This inversion of roles highlights the complete destabilization of professional hierarchies. The "authority" has moved from the byline to the encrypted message.

The deployment of automated "fact-checking" tools, meant to be a solution, often becomes another layer of failure. These tools, struggling with the nuances of Bengali satire or political context, frequently flag legitimate

critique as "false news" while letting sophisticated propaganda pass. The "breakdown" is not just that the tool doesn't work; it's that it provides a veneer of technological objectivity to what is essentially a chaotic moderation process. The "Checked by AI" label becomes a source of confusion rather than clarity.

IV. DISCUSSION

The trajectory of these findings suggests that the media crisis in the Global South cannot be solved by simply "upgrading" the technology or "training" the journalists. The rot is structural. We are observing a phenomenon where the "market for truth" has been fundamentally distorted by the interplay of platform capitalism and authoritarian politics. The "alternative" platforms are not a correction to the market; they are a symptom of its failure.

The "trust" that has migrated to citizen journalists and digital influencers is fragile and conditional. It is based on a perception of "anti-establishment" authenticity rather than a track record of accuracy [4,8]. This makes the information ecosystem incredibly volatile. A single popular YouTuber can mobilize thousands of people onto the streets based on a rumor, and the mainstream media, having lost its credibility, has no power to counter the narrative. The "gatekeeper" is dead, but the "mob" has not yet learned to curate.

There is a profound irony in the fact that the tools of "connectivity"—the mobile internet, the social platform—have led to a fragmentation of reality. The "filter bubble" in Bangladesh is not just about differing opinions; it is about differing facts. The pro-government algorithm and the anti-government algorithm effectively describe two different countries. The citizen journalist, operating within these bubbles, feeds the bias of their specific audience to maintain engagement. The "loop" is closed.

Moreover, the financial sustainability of the alternative model is suspect. Most of these digital platforms rely on the same ad-tech ecosystem as the mainstream. They are equally vulnerable to demonetization, shadow-banning, and algorithmic shifts. The "freedom" of the digital creator is an illusion; they are sharecroppers on land owned by Meta and Alphabet [6]. If the platform decides that political content in Bangladesh is a "brand safety risk," the revenue dries up instantly. The entire ecosystem is built on rented land.

The concept of "editorial autonomy" needs to be reimaged. It is no longer about the freedom of the editor to choose the front-page lead. It is about the capacity of the journalism ecosystem to survive the "extraction" of value by the platforms. The data indicates that without a fundamental shift in the business model—away from the click-economy and perhaps toward member-funded or non-profit models—the drift toward sensationalism and subservience to the algorithm will continue. The "machine" is not just shaping the news; it is eating it.

V. CONCLUSION

The displacement of mainstream journalism in Bangladesh by alternative digital platforms is a "fait accompli." The audience has moved. They have moved because the mobile phone offered them a portal to a world that felt more immediate, more participatory, and, crucially, less controlled than the curated reality of the newspaper. But this new world is a wilderness. It is governed by algorithms that do not speak the language, by influencers who have no code of ethics, and by a state that lurks in the shadows of the network.

The "editorial judgment" that was once the anchor of public discourse has been unmoored. It is floating in a sea of metrics. The attempt to reintegrate it through "human-in-the-loop" systems or "AI ethics" is largely cosmetic, a bandage on a gaping wound. The friction between the human desire for meaning and the algorithmic demand for engagement has not been resolved; it has simply been monetized.

The rise of the alternative is a signal of the profound failure of the institution. If journalism is to survive in this environment, it cannot simply try to mimic the speed or the volume of the platform. It must rediscover a value that the algorithm cannot replicate: trust. But trust, once broken, is the hardest metric to rebuild. Until then, the news will continue to be something that happens to the editor, rather than something the editor controls.

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A Journey From Silence to Speech: Women's Quest for Identity in Chitra B. Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* and *The Forest of Enchantments*

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Abstract— *The modern, contemporary feminist rewritings of myth allow a much-needed reconstruction of the ancient mythical women and also challenge traditional narratives that have historically silenced these women's voices. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in The Palace of Illusions and The Forest of Enchantments re-imagines Indian epics through the perspectives of female protagonists marginalized in canonical texts and hence, becomes able to re-tell the saga afresh in the voice of these mythical heroines. This paper attempts to explore how Divakaruni has managed to reconstruct figures like Draupadi and Sita. Through her retelling she has attempted to transform these women figures from passive receivers of destiny into strong, self-aware narrators of their own experiences. This gradual but powerful movement from silence to speech represents a profound quest for identity, agency, autonomy and self-recognition. By granting these women narrative authority Divakaruni, not only reconstructs the myth, but also tackles contemporary questions and challenges revolving around gender power and personal agency. This paper argues that such retellings serve as a potent medium to create literary spaces where suppressed voices regain dignity. These retold sagas, also, redefine womanhood in both mythic and modern contexts. Moreover, these narratives encourage the modern readers to reassess their inherited traditions, question patriarchal structures, and acknowledge the transformative potential of women's storytelling in reforming cultural memory as well as historical consciousness.*



Keywords— *Feminist Rewritings, Traditional Narratives, Quest for Identity, Women's Storytelling, Cultural Memory, Historical Consciousness*

Mythological epics are not only a racial memory but they have, often, traditionally served as carriers of cultural values, moral ideals, and social codes. They shape collective memory and define accepted models of heroism, devotion, and righteousness. However, while preserving tradition, these narratives have also reinforced patriarchal norms by centering male experiences and reducing women to symbolic or idealized roles. In the original versions of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, women like Draupadi and Sita are revered as embodiments of virtue and endurance, yet their inner lives, personal conflicts, and emotional struggles remain largely unexplored. Their identities are

constructed through male viewpoints, and their silence is interpreted as obedience and moral perfection rather than as a sign of suppressed individuality. This traditional representation reflects a cultural pattern in which women are remembered more for their sacrifice than for their selfhood. In this regard Suzette H. Eikelenboom has rightly opined that:

Mythology is often considered to consist of archetypal and universally applicable stories about the nature of the universe and human life. As a result, this has often led to the notion that myth is stagnant and unchangeable precisely because of its

universality and timelessness. However, like all storytelling, myths evolve and adapt. (Eikelenboom 4)

Modern feminist literature seeks to address this imbalance by revisiting myths from women's perspectives. Retelling becomes an act of questioning inherited authority and reopening spaces that were previously closed to female consciousness. Feminist revisionist mythology challenges the idea that epics are fixed narratives and instead presents them as living texts that can be reinterpreted to include excluded voices. Within this literary movement, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni emerges as a significant and influential voice. Her novels *The Palace of Illusions* and *The Forest of Enchantments* reimagine the Indian epics through the eyes of Draupadi and Sita, granting them emotional depth, psychological complexity, and narrative freedom. Divakaruni does not merely add women's voices to old stories but reshapes the very structure of storytelling by allowing female protagonists to become self-aware narrators of their experiences.

This paper examines how Divakaruni reconstructs female identity through voice, memory, and self-expression. The transition from silence to speech becomes a powerful metaphor for the broader struggle of women to claim agency, dignity, and selfhood within patriarchal traditions. Draupadi questions destiny and challenges unjust authority, while Sita reflects on love, loyalty, and personal integrity. Their voices transform them from passive figures of fate into conscious individuals shaping their own meaning. Through such retellings, myth becomes a dynamic discourse where women reclaim their stories and redefine their place in cultural history. Divakaruni's reimagined epics thus bridge ancient tradition and contemporary feminist thought, reminding readers that when women speak, history itself gains new perspective and renewed humanity. Divakaruni does not merely retell Indian epics but reinterprets them through a distinctly feminine consciousness that reshapes the meaning and purpose of myth itself. Her act of rewriting becomes a powerful literary intervention that challenges inherited authority and questions the long-accepted dominance of male centered narratives. Krishna Mondal and others have rightly opined in one of their research papers that:

Myths and mythology of India, establish patriarchal ideologies and tend to marginalize women within society by positioning them to inferior roles. Feminist revisionists provide a fresh perspective, specifically a female point of view that destabilizes the grand narrative and questions conventional androcentric ideology. (Mondal et al. 700)

Traditional epic storytelling has historically positioned women as supporting figures whose identities are defined

by male heroes and social expectations. She disrupts this structure by shifting narrative control to female protagonists, thereby transforming the way readers engage with familiar mythological events. Through this creative re-visioning, she reclaims narrative space that was once denied to women and uses it to explore emotional depth and psychological truth. In *The Palace of Illusions*, Draupadi narrates her own life story. This narrative choice allows readers to witness the events of the *Mahabharata* not as distant historical episodes but as lived experiences shaped by personal feelings and inner conflicts. Draupadi reflects on her desires, disappointments, ambitions, and moral dilemmas with remarkable honesty. Her voice reveals the cost of duty and the pain of injustice, elements that were minimized in traditional versions. By presenting Draupadi as a self-aware storyteller, Divakaruni gives her authority over her own identity. She is no longer a silent figure remembered only for her humiliation in the royal court but a thinking and questioning individual who interprets her own destiny. Soumya Priyadarshini and Manisha Upadhyay in their research paper have stated:

Through reversing the roles and putting Draupadi to an equal position of one who tells the story, Divakaruni challenges the traditional portrayal of women in myths and reinvents their roles as reasoners, will-considerers and transformers. (Priyadarshini and Upadhyay 782)

Similarly, in *The Forest of Enchantments*, Sita recounts her trials with deep introspection and self-dignity. Divakaruni presents Sita not merely as an obedient wife but as a woman capable of reflection, resistance, and inner strength. Her narration explores emotional vulnerability alongside moral courage. Sita speaks of love, loyalty, loss, and isolation in ways that humanize her beyond idealized devotion. This retelling allows readers to understand her choices and sufferings from within rather than through the judgments of external voices. Her speech becomes an assertion of selfhood in a world that once demanded her silence.

These narrative strategies break the monopoly of male centered storytelling and challenge the idea that traditional versions hold absolute authority. Women in Divakaruni's novels are no longer spoken about but speak for themselves. This shift questions the authenticity of inherited narratives and opens myth to multiple interpretations where women emerge as creators of meaning rather than objects of destiny. Divakaruni thus transforms myth into a democratic space of storytelling where forgotten voices gain power and cultural memory is rewritten with empathy and justice. In the classical Indian epics, silence functions as a powerful tool of control that sustains patriarchal authority and defines the limits of female existence. Women are often expected to endure suffering without protest, and their silence is

celebrated as a sign of virtue, devotion, and moral strength. Draupadi, in the *Mahabharata*, is publicly humiliated in the royal court, yet her cries for justice are dismissed and her voice is rendered powerless in a space dominated by male authority. Similarly, in the *Ramayana*, Sita is forced into exile and subjected to a trial by fire to prove her purity, while her suffering is framed as an ideal of wifely devotion. In both narratives, silence becomes a means through which women are disciplined, their individuality suppressed, and their agency denied. Their experiences are remembered, but their inner voices remain unheard. Divakaruni brilliantly exposes the injustice of such imposed silence by reimagining these women as conscious individuals whose inner worlds demand recognition. In her retellings, silence is no longer a noble virtue but a condition born of emotional repression, social obedience, and forced endurance. Draupadi's silence is shown as a burden that weighs upon her spirit, filled with unspoken anger, humiliation, and longing for justice. Sita's quiet suffering is reinterpreted as a survival strategy in a world that refuses to listen to women's pain. Divakaruni reveals that behind the traditional image of the silent woman lies a complex emotional landscape that deserves expression. By highlighting the psychological cost of silence, she questions the cultural glorification of female endurance.

However, these novels do not remain within the realm of voiceless suffering. Gradually, silence is transformed into a space of self-reflection and inner strength. Draupadi begins to understand her worth beyond the roles imposed upon her, while Sita discovers dignity in solitude and self-awareness. Their silence becomes a phase of introspection that prepares them for speech. The movement from voicelessness to expression thus becomes a symbolic journey of reclaiming identity. When these women finally articulate their thoughts and emotions, their speech carries the weight of truth shaped by experience. In Divakaruni's vision, speaking truth becomes an act of resistance against unjust traditions. Draupadi questions the morality of a society that dishonors her, and Sita challenges the expectations placed upon her as an ideal wife. Their voices confront authority and disrupt the silence that once controlled them. Through this transformation, Divakaruni asserts that breaking silence is not merely personal liberation but a cultural and political act. The journey from silence to speech ultimately represents the awakening of selfhood and the reclaiming of dignity in a world that once demanded submission.

Voice in Divakaruni's novels becomes the true representation of selfhood and personal identity. In traditional epic narratives, women are often defined by their relationships and duties, their individuality overshadowed by the expectations of patriarchal society. Divakaruni disrupts this pattern by granting her female protagonists the

power to speak, reflect, and narrate their own experiences. Their voices become a medium through which suppressed emotions, hidden desires, and unacknowledged suffering are finally expressed. This act of speaking transforms them from silent figures shaped by fate into conscious individuals who actively interpret their lives. Voice thus becomes the foundation of self-awareness and the first step toward autonomy. Draupadi in *The Palace of Illusions* questions destiny, challenges dharma, and interrogates the roles imposed upon her as daughter, wife, and queen. Her speech reflects anger, pride, vulnerability, and wisdom, revealing a layered personality far removed from her traditional portrayal. Similarly, Sita in *The Forest of Enchantments* redefines devotion not as blind submission but as a conscious and ethical choice rooted in self-respect. Through introspection and narration, Sita explores the meaning of love, loyalty, and endurance, presenting devotion as strength rather than surrender. Their speech is not limited to external dialogue but takes the form of inner narration where they analyze their experiences and assign meaning to their suffering and joys.

This narrative authority allows both women to redefine concepts such as honor, love, duty, and sacrifice from their own perspectives. Honor is no longer linked to public approval, love is freed from possession, duty is balanced with self-worth, and sacrifice becomes a chosen act rather than forced submission. Through speech, they construct identities that are independent of male validation and societal expectations. Divakaruni thus presents speech as an act of liberation that challenges the structures of silence and obedience. Storytelling itself becomes a tool of empowerment, allowing women to reclaim their histories, assert their presence, and inspire future generations to recognize the power of their own voices. Both protagonists in Divakaruni's reimagined epics undergo profound psychological journeys that redefine their sense of self. Rather than remaining static figures bound by destiny, Draupadi and Sita emerge as emotionally complex individuals who confront inner conflicts and external pressures. Their journeys are shaped not only by the events around them but also by their responses to suffering, love, betrayal, and expectation. Through this inward exploration, Divakaruni transforms legendary women into relatable human beings whose struggles resonate with readers across time and culture.

Draupadi in *The Palace of Illusions* wrestles with pride, ambition, desire, and a deep sense of injustice. She is conscious of her intelligence and strength, yet she is repeatedly trapped within political games and patriarchal norms. Her inner monologues reveal conflicting emotions of love and resentment, hope and despair. She questions the fairness of fate and challenges the moral codes that demand

her silence. This internal struggle shapes her evolving identity, as she learns to recognize her worth beyond the roles imposed upon her. Her psychological journey reflects the tension between personal aspiration and social expectation, a conflict faced by many modern women. Similarly, Sita in *The Forest of Enchantments* embarks on a different yet equally significant quest. She searches for belonging, dignity, and inner peace in a world that constantly tests her loyalty and virtue. Exile, isolation, and misunderstanding force her to turn inward and discover her own emotional strength. Her reflections reveal patience, courage, and self-respect that grow stronger with every trial. Sita's journey becomes a path toward self-realization, where endurance transforms into wisdom and acceptance becomes empowerment.

In Divakaruni's vision, identity is not fixed but continuously evolving through experience, suffering, and self-understanding. These women are no longer distant mythic icons but individuals shaped by doubts, desires, anger, and hope. Such emotional realism bridges the distance between ancient myth and contemporary womanhood. Their quests mirror the struggles of modern women who balance tradition and individuality, duty and desire, silence and speech. The search for identity thus becomes universal and timeless, reminding readers that the journey toward selfhood transcends history, culture, and myth.

Divakaruni's retellings of Indian epics resonate deeply with modern feminist discourse because they challenge long established narratives that have traditionally defined women through sacrifice and obedience. In canonical versions of the epics, female suffering is often portrayed as noble and desirable, reinforcing the belief that endurance and silence are essential virtues of womanhood. Divakaruni's novels question this cultural conditioning by exposing the emotional cost of such expectations. Her reimagined narratives invite readers to critically re-examine stories that have shaped social attitudes toward gender for centuries. By giving women the power to narrate their own experiences, Divakaruni urges readers to recognize how cultural traditions have often normalized inequality under the guise of moral duty.

These novels also suggest that tradition need not be entirely rejected but thoughtfully re-interpreted with justice, empathy, and inclusiveness. Divakaruni does not discard the epics or undermine their cultural significance. Instead, she reconstructs them from perspectives that were previously unheard, proving that tradition is not static but open to renewal. Her retellings maintain the spiritual and ethical essence of the original texts while challenging their

patriarchal interpretations. This balance between respect for heritage and the demand for gender justice creates a meaningful conversation between the past and the present. By rewriting the epics, Divakaruni creates a dialogue across time where women reclaim history and reshape cultural memory. Draupadi and Sita are no longer remembered only through male centered storytelling but as women who understand, question, and define their own lives. This reclamation of narrative space allows forgotten emotions and silenced experiences to enter collective consciousness. Cultural memory thus becomes more inclusive and representative of diverse voices. These stories inspire contemporary readers to recognize their own voices in societies that still struggle with gender inequality. Women readers in particular find reflections of their personal conflicts between tradition and autonomy, duty and self-respect. Divakaruni's retellings remind them that speaking out is not a betrayal of culture but a necessary step toward transformation. In this way, her novels extend beyond literature to become instruments of social awareness, encouraging a future where equality and empathy guide the reinterpretation of tradition.

From silence to speech represents a transformative journey of reclaiming selfhood. Divakaruni's reimagined epics restore dignity and agency to women whose voices were overshadowed by patriarchal storytelling. Draupadi and Sita emerge not as mere symbols of endurance but as conscious narrators of their own destiny. Through voice, memory, and self-expression they achieve identity and autonomy, challenging the limitations imposed upon them by tradition. These feminist retellings redefine myth as a living tradition capable of reflecting justice, equality, and human truth. Divakaruni's work ultimately reminds readers that when women speak, history itself begins to change. Cultural memory becomes more inclusive, and silenced experiences find rightful expression. Her narratives encourage future generations to question inherited norms, resist injustice, and embrace the power of their own voices, proving that storytelling can become a force of transformation in both literature and society.

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English Language Education at Vietnamese Buddhist Universities Compared to Buddhist Universities Worldwide

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Abstract— *The present paper examines the position of English language teaching in Vietnamese Buddhist colleges and compares this situation to that found in Buddhist universities around Asia and the West. In a time of globalisation, English has become the lingua franca in academia and elsewhere not only for academic exchange and research but also transnational Buddhist dialog. While the Vietnamese Buddhist academies have experienced significant institutional expansion, this has not yet necessarily translated into monastic students with robust English-language skills necessary for meaningful connections in global academic networks. Building on applied linguistics theories, such as EMI/CLIL (English-Medium Instruction / Content and Language Integrated Learning), combined with sociocultural frameworks, our study proposes that the knowledge gap seen in language use is not the result of cultural unfitness or intellectual inability but systemic and pedagogical incongruities. In the context of Vietnamese Buddhist learning, English is seen more as an adjunct than critical tool for thought and doctrinal reflection. It also goes into psychological factors including foreign language anxiety, shyness and lack of confidence being substantiated by some Vietnamese recent studies. In comparing Buddhist universities in Singapore, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Australia and the United States it is concluded that institutions which manage to integrate English as a core academic medium effectively produce more globally engaged monastic scholars. The paper closes with a call for reform that would enable English to become an upāya-type skillful means of contemporary Dharma transmission. This shift requires an institutional policy adjustment, integrated pedagogical methods and emotional support for the learners.*



Keywords— *English Language Education, ELT, Vietnam Buddhist University*

I. INTRODUCTION

Indeed, the three first decades of the twenty-first century have been a transformative period for Buddhist higher education with monastic scholarship becoming rapidly globalized, exchanges across national borders multiplying and collaboration across cultural divides gaining momentum. The metropolis constructed out of Dharma transmission has become a world wide academic pursuit where Buddhist learning enter into conversation with the world wide standards science, pedagogy and communication. Philosophical conferences concerning Buddhism are held in cities such as Singapore, Kyoto,

Sydney, and Los Angeles; early canonical texts have been digitized and spread through transnational databases; the movement of monks and nuns between Asia and the West is a normative practice. At the heart of this entire universe is a common academic language: English. Irrespective of theological affiliation or country of origin, it is in English that Buddhist thought now engages with the modern world.

In this emerging intellectual ecology, the ability to speak and read a language is not just convenient; it is also both a condition of scholarly visibility and epistemic playing field (or so we argue). It is implied that language competence (English reading, writing and speaking) is the pre-requisite

for publishing, presenting research works as well as academic discussion. As a result, English in Buddhist higher education is no longer an extracurricular foreign language but an instrument of the mind. In English-infused Buddhist studies as a medium of instruction, language of research and the lingua franca of inter-monastic communiqué it appears as a forceful factor in Vipassanā's intellectual modernization. On the other hand, if it is marginalized to the fringes and reduced to supplementary grammar or translation drills, it may become nothing more than a token.

Symbolically located in this reconfiguration of planetary coordinates are Vietnamese Buddhist institutions. These academies have drawn more resources and students, and expanded in size in terms of infrastructure, student population as well as scope of curriculum over the past 40 years. The B.A.s at VBA's in Ho Chi Minh City, Hue and Hanoi churn out hundreds of graduates each year, many who continue to post graduate studies or become teachers for the Sangha. Their courses cover the entire range of classical Buddhist philosophy as well Pāli and Sanskrit studies, ethics psychology and social service fields and are testimony to both intellectual excellence and spiritual depth. And yet, despite this institutional strength, there is one shortcoming that has been both intractable and well known: the poor English competence of their monastic students and alumni.

This deficiency carries tangible consequences. Not many Vietnamese monks or nuns could learn further research in international Buddhist conferences and publish on overseas English journals. Translation of Vietnamese Buddhist studies into English is spotty, but the import of Western or regional English-language research far eclipses domestic output. This asymmetry is not just linguistic but epistemological, because without proficiency in English, Vietnamese monks and nuns are relegated as the receptacle rather than the engine of global Buddhist exchange.

This paper aims at identifying the theoretical, institutional and psychological sources which contribute to this gap between Buddhist universities in Vietnam and those in Singapore, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Australia and USA. It argues that the relative incompetence in English of Vietnamese monastics is not simply a manifestation of intrinsic intellectual or cultural insufficiency, but is constituted through the interrelationship between prevalent pedagogical models and material contexts. Out of these, the marginalisation of English and its teaching as a subject outside that of Buddhism as opposed to one through which doctrinal and philosophical meanings are constructed. Put more simply, English is made to be of Buddhism not in Buddhism.

To underpin the claim, reference is selectively made to some of recent Vietnamese work in this area including especially Phan Thi Ngoc Le (2025) on page 1610 volume 7 of ICTE Conference Proceedings who carried out an empirical study that examined psychological barriers related to student success of englishningspeaking presentations. Though Le's study took place in the more general university environment, its insights can be easily applied to monastic education, where comparable affective and cognitive processes are at work. Le pinpointed anxiety, shyness, lack of confidence and low motivation as the hindering factors for speaking performance. Her findings from quantitative and qualitative studies of students in a Presentation Skills course taken at Vietnam National University, indicated that even well-trained participants, when it came to live communication experience panic resulting from worrying what other people will think about them and were overly anxious to show their best side. This cluster of psychological variables (referred to as foreign language anxiety) was determined to be a more powerful predictor for success in second/foreign language use than linguistic ability alone (Le, 2025, pp. 56–60).

Even in the Buddhist context, Le's findings take on added relevance. Monastic learners are trained in an ethic of humility, self-discipline, and putting the self on the lineimportant qualities for spiritual practice but not necessarily valuable criteria when speaking forcefully in a new language. A monk who is reluctant to "show the self" in public speech can unconsciously assimilate linguistic silence as a moral value. Therefore, the deficiencies of Vietnamese monastics in expressing ideas in English are not simply a matter of poor vocabulary or grammar, but should also be seen as examples of cultural-psychological disjuncture between monastic modesty and the concrete stylistic requirements of academic discourse.

More generally, the institutional ecology of Vietnamese Buddhist education is a contributing factor. In contrast to education in Singapore or Thailand, where English medium instruction (EMI) is increasingly the norm for religious higher learning, Vietnamese academies still deliver all doctrinal and philosophical units of study through the medium of Vietnamese or else, Sometimes 8 Dr Kenneally & Blind conventionally added-do quadratic Sino-Vietnamese and classical languages(i.e., Pāli). English, where it is provided, is an optional offering or a course of study (usually light credit-weight) also frequently uncoupled from core academic subject matter. Therefore, learners of English meet it as an item to be studied, not an instrument for thought. This structural division produces a compartmentalized form of bilingualism: monks think in Buddhist doctrine in Vietnamese and learn English as a mechanical code unrelated to such doctrinal reasoning.

In comparison, institutions such as the Buddhist College of Singapore (Singapore), International Buddhist Studies College (Thailand) and Nan Tien Institute (Australia) operate with English as the primary means for communication and cognitive language. Lectures in Abhidhamma, Mahāyāna philosophy, and Buddhist ethics are conducted in English; teachers tutor research, including writing and peer review, in English; students present at international colloquia with English as the unmarked norm. So the linguistic environment becomes ever more closed: English proficiency is not an external criterion, it defines the interior of how one participates. In such a situation, fluency is simply the side effect of disciplinary osmosis.

But Vietnamese schools continue to be positioned within a monolingual national context with little use of English outside the classroom. Monastics seldom speak and study with foreign students or teachers including international scholars for any length of time on campus, not do they have institutionalized relationships with Buddhist universities in British which teach in English. What that creates is an environment of low exposure, so English ability plateaus despite some presence in the curriculum.

The task is, then, pedagogical and philosophical. For pedagogy, it demands a restructuring of curricula to join language with content in the EMI or CLIL. In a philosophical sense, it requires a return to the question of language in Buddhist education. For the teachings of the Buddha have in general, over history, adjusted to linguistic diversity from Pāli to Chinese to Tibetan — in order to transport insight among cultures. For us, of course, in the modern world, English serves this mediating role. Instead of being inauthentic, attempting to study Buddhism in English is an extension of the tradition of upāya even if we regard it as a very temporary measure.

The core argument in this article is that the inferiority of English among monastic trainees does not owe to cultural incompetence, but communication gaps and pedagogical misfits. English as now taught does not form so much a part of the constitution in Buddhist intellect, as it does an adjunct to its formation. It will not shift as an organ of thought—a site for reading canons, formulating doctrine, or participating in global scholarship—until it is repositioned. The challenge for educators and policy-makers then is to conceive of English not as a foreign language at all but as bridge between Dharma and modernity; an updated instantiation in fact, of the long historical trajectory by way of which Buddhism has always sounded its voice anew in every tongue.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Language, Thought, and the Medium of Buddhist Scholarship

An implicit philosophy of language underpins every type of education—an un verbalized view of how the form of language mediates its content. This interrelationship has been crucial to the development of Buddhist lineages. From the conversion of Magadhan dialects into Pāli, to the Sanskritization of Mahāyāna texts and later Sinicized versions of the canon, every age has readapted doctrinal language into a new idiom. Never has language resources been neutral; they rather are a deposit of cognitive experience that has much to say on how reality, doctrine and practice are apprehended.

And in the 21st century, English is the newest member of this historical line of adaptation. As the world's lingua franca of academic exchanges, not only does it help one to communicate, but also to legitimate forms of knowing. To study something in English or teach it at the university means to operate within this sphere of international scholarship; for here resides peer reviewed (and genius as well;) citation and research accessibility. Thus, for Buddhist higher education, English functions as an external language of access, and also an internal one of reasoning. As English becomes the “interlocutor” through which Buddhist ideas are explored and repackaged, it promotes something that we might call cognitive bilingualism, thinking about Buddhist philosophy across two semantic domains at once. If, on the other hand, it remains the sole foreign language offered in isolation it will fail to live up to its transforming potential.

This is the theoretical assumption of this study, that the linguistic media has a direct influence on epistemic reach. The gap in English proficiency between Vietnamese Buddhist academies and their foreign counterparts, then, might best be understood not just as a pedagogical deficiency, but as indicative of the structural discrepancy between language policy and knowledge production.

2.2. English Medium Instruction (EMI) and CLIL in Religious Higher Education

In applied linguistics, the constructs EMI and CLIL have gained prominence as vital to our understanding of the intersection of language and content. Although the term EMI as suggested by Macaro (2018) is defined as the teaching of academic subjects in English, where this is not the students' first language. Though was not an actual concept formed from the theoreticians it is possible to consider CLIL as a European instance of content and language integrated learning for two reasons: there are educational reforms in Europe, only few countries have these programmes and they must not necessarily be adopted by schools.

One important point of divergence between these models concerns the role played by English. In the traditional language classroom, Teaching English as a Foreign Language tends to be very objectified - ELT seems often only to be a set of grammatical rules and vocabulary lists. In contrast, EMI and CLIL have English as the medium of interaction with disciplinary knowledge. This transition has profound implications for the classroom: students read real texts, debate ideas and write analytical essays in English outside of their scientific studies which leads them to develop greater academic literacy (as well as understanding of concepts).

What is more, findings from empirical studies in the latter part of this century tend to confirm that integrated programs are effective. As shown by Byrne and Macaro (2019) as well as Dafouz & Smit (2020), the resulting observations are that EMI students generate contrasting levels of disciplinary vocabulary retention, pragmatic fluency, and intercultural competence from their counterparts in traditional English as a Foreign Language (EFL) programmes. Significantly, no additional instruction hours are added to achieve this improvement but the teaching of English is embedded in content and is experiential.

Applying these insights to Buddhist higher education leads to an inevitable conclusion: if Buddhist colleges and universities do not adopt EMI or CLIL in some way—by teaching Abhidhamma, Buddhist logic, or morals in English—their students' language development will be stunted. This is symptomatic of the structural distinction we see between Vietnam and countries such as for instance Thailand or Sri Lanka where main Buddhist universities already have English-medium colleges (see for instance the International Buddhist Studies College at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University).

2.3. Quality Assurance and Linguistic Policy

Competence to work in language does not flourish in a vacuum; it is supported by institutional structures that mandate quality control and reporting. Within secular higher education, accrediting bodies such as TEQSA (Australia) and WSCUC (U.S.) also spell out requirements for English competency of faculty and students. The Nan Tien Institute, for example, has to show that their curricula meet national English standards (TEQSA, 2023). These kinds of mechanisms require curriculum developers to align pedagogy, testing, and faculty development with empirically measured linguistic results.

Vietnamese Buddhist institutions, on the other hand, work within a semiautonomous religious system. Their titles are recognized by the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha and not by the Ministry of Education and Training's international

accreditation system. As a result, there are no uniform entry or exit expectations for English proficiency. This lack of external assessment means that there is a wide range: some of the academies focus on Pāli and/or Chinese to the exclusion of modern languages, others run courses in English to differing degrees or duration. Lacking clear objectives, even if students are motivated there is no clear incentive to become communicatively competent.

The ICTE 74 study is an exemplar snippet of how systematic quality assurance can work. Le's (2025, p. 61) investigation showed that the students' entering levels, B1 level under Vietnam's national six-level framework was a must in order to take Presentation Skills course. This requirement allowed for a basic communicative foundation to be in place so that the instructor could focus on higher-level speaking skills (e.g., audience analysis, organization, and critical reflection). Reliability coefficients greater than 0.70 indicate that learning was evident through a structured 15-wk process of theory, practice and feedback. The lesson was clear: when explicit linguistic standards are enforced as policy, students learn. On the other hand, when rule exists informally or not at all, stagnation occurs.

2.4. The Psychology of SecondLanguage Performance

If structural and policy factors explain some of the institutional differences, performance at individual level is largely influenced by psychological determinants. We have seen that linguistic SLA has been confirmed to acknowledge more and more the key role of affects, motivation, self-efficacy, and anxiety, in prompting successful learning. Krashen's (1982) "affective filter" hypothesis is fundamental one here: emotional stress can create a barrier to turning comprehensible input into acquired competence.

Findings from Phan Thi Ngoc Le's (2025) descriptive study at Vietnam National University validate this theoretical view. In the course of her classroom observation, interviews and surveys revealed fear, shyness, negative self-perception and poor motivation as major obstacles to fluent oral English (pp. 56–60). Students would often pause, forget a word or use clumsy expressions (not because they didn't know the grammar) - but it was psychological interference. The current study also supports some preceding studies such as Brown (2001), Gebhard (2006) and Elhadi (2017) that revealed significant negative fear of negative evaluation and relatively low self-esteem have an effect on learners' willingness to communicate.

To translate these findings to a monastic educational setting much cultural nuance has to be weighed. Vietnamese monastery cultures are inhospitable to communicative expression (in beginner Vietnamese), focusing as they do on principles of humility, restraint, and deference. A young

monk might see perfect spoken English as an assertion of self in a way that is out of place in monastic decorum. Thus, psychological barriers are and cannot just be situational; they are also socially constructed. Now you have a double emotional filter: the fear of language coupled with religious humility.

From an educational standpoint, this place where psychology meets culture demands specific prescribed responses. Le (2025, pp. 62–64) found that by repeatedly performing in front of their peers and receiving consistent feedback, the worries were greatly reduced and they gained confidence to perform the task. It seems that Buddhist academies may significantly benefit from implementing a communicative practice, structured diary-keeping, and mindfulness-based anxiety management which are in line with the Buddhist contemplative tradition and tackle linguistic anxiety effectively.

2.5. Integrating Sociocultural Theory

A second important underpinning theory is based on the Vygotskian sociocultural tradition which from 1978 (as with the cognitive tradition) has been concerned with learning being constructed through mediated activity; that it takes place in a specific social context and cannot exist anywhere else but within this (Zone of Proximal Development, ZPD). From this perspective, the learning of a language cannot be reduced to a simple acquisition and accumulation of knowledge in isolated items; it is an experience like being part in a community of practice. If we apply this insight to Buddhist education, English competency is not achieved through textbook study alone: it comes about via active participation in real communicative events—sermons, discussions and research colloquia which were run in English. Without this social scaffolding, learners will tend to become stuck at the plateau of passive competence.

This perspective highlights the importance of Vietnamese Buddhist academies to develop communities of practice in English. This is true of international Buddhist universities: students at the International Buddhist Studies College in Thailand or at the University of the West in California don't merely get drilled with English, they are thrown into an English-speaking context. Peers and faculty from diverse language backgrounds naturally create a ZPD with English as the medium for understanding each other.

By contrast, the monastic space in Vietnam is almost entirely homogeneous linguistically. If there are no chances to interact for real, the social component of language learning is deprived from light and air. Thus, any theory of reform would need to both bring together English Medium Instruction (EMI) and sociocultural scaffolding in

which English is a tool and outcome of collaborative Buddhist inquiry.

2.6. Synthesis: A Tripartite Model

Pulling these threads together, we can understand the development of English for Buddhist higher education in threefold: a) The characteristics of English learning emanating from theoretical understanding, philosophic framework and practical reality.

Institutional environment - policies, accreditation, curriculum design, which governs the level of EMI and CLIL use but also the means of quality assurance.

Pedagogical Process -This includes the classroom process, teacher quality, and assessment practices which enable language and content to be integrated.

Psychological Context — the affective and sociocultural aspects contributing to learners' confidence and motivation.

Phan Thi Ngoc Le(2025)'s research informs this third domain empirically, whilst the international Buddhist universities are good example of how configurations of dimensions one and two can be organised successfully. The Vietnamese situation is about the three aspects in disproportion: institutional frailty, pedagogical fragmentation and psychological resistance feed each other to form a cycle of restricted linguistic output.

The model introduced in this article combines applied linguistics with sociocultural and affective psychology, treating English proficiency not as an isolated ability but a complex policy-, pedagogy- and psyche-dependent phenomenon. Only by confronting all three levels at once can Vietnamese Buddhist education move beyond its present confinement to a particular language and engage seriously in the global intellectual conversation around contemporary Buddhism.

III. CURRENT ENGLISH EDUCATION IN VIETNAMESE BUDDHIST INSTITUTES

3.1. Institutional Landscape and Historical Development

To understand the current situation of the teaching of English in Viet Nam Buddhist institutions, it is important to see such educational systems in a historical and institutional context. After the fall of South Vietnam in 1975, Buddhist education went through a process of centralization by government and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam_Buddhist_Sangha (Giáo hội Phật giáo Việt Nam) control. The foundation of major universities in Ho Chi Minh City (1984), Hue (1997) and Hanoi (2005) marked the historic entry of monastic curricula into the tertiary education system; formal monastic schools were now seen as fully national

establishments. But unlike the secular universities under the Ministry of Education and Training, Buddhist academies are subjected to ecclesiastical administration where their curricula generally reflect a stronger emphasis on the cultivation of doctrinal proficiency, moral ethical growth, and counseling abilities.

The western education also has been introduced at these schools during 1990s and was taught as optional in English or Chinese. This decision was more pragmatic than academic – it was in order to teach monks and nuns enough English to be able to communicate with international pilgrims, or read basic Buddhist teachings. As the world-openness and opportunities for studying overseas became broader, administrators of that time responded by adding formal English modules to the curriculum structure at the secondary and high school levels. However, these modules were still placed on the margin of learning. Today, all three academies require students to take a set of English courses—usually English 1–2 or English for Buddhist Studies 1–6—with a total of about 8–12 of the approximately 130 credits. This ratio, as measured against educational programs in Singapore and Thailand where English is the medium of instruction, highlights the still subordinate role that language plays in Buddhist education.

3.2. Curriculum Content and Pedagogical Orientation

From the review of course outlines and syllabi from 2022 to 2025, most Vietnamese Buddhist English courses show evidence of traditional grammar–translation. The teaching materials used are locally produced textbooks, focusing on Buddhist terms, short reading passages about the life of Buddha as well as translation exercises from English to Vietnamese. In those courses, the listening and speaking elements are significantly scarce and we hardly use authentic materials like academic articles or global meeting papers.

This compares with the approach of Phan Thi Ngoc Le (2025) with Vietnam National University (VNU). In her Presentation Skills class, for example, students work in repeated rounds of theoretical learning followed by practical applications such as solo presentations and discussion groups, slide design practice and peer reviews. Emphasis in the course design is placed on critical thinking, creativity, and confidence building among students (Le in 2025, pp.61–63). On the other hand, Buddhist English courses also focus a great deal on accuracy of vocabulary and grammar (even more so than fluency and communicative competency). The addition of oral based activities, even on a small scale involves listening to the recitation of prewritten dialogues as opposed to actual spontaneous interaction.

Evidence of a further pedagogical constraint is revealed in the methods of assessment used in such courses. End-of-course exams focus mainly on reading and translating, and little or nothing on listening or conversational composition. This disproportion is a reflection of institutional values: written exams are less time consuming to organize and sit well with the monastic focus on memorization of scriptures. Nevertheless, as the ICTE 74 report pointed out, the absence of such formative oral testing denies learners beneficial guidance forming part of any anxiety-reducing and performance-enhancing response to language delivery (Le et al., 2025: 59–60).

3.3. Faculty Qualifications and Teaching Resources

The teachers in the Buddhist academy greatly affect the quality of English education. Most teachers in these schools are monks or nuns with experience studying overseas and who have no formal qualifications in TESOL. Their language abilities of English are to be commended, but all too frequently their teaching takes the form of how they were taught rather than in line with current second-language pedagogy. A small group of lay teachers with English degrees are also employed on a part-time basis. But their scanty knowledge on Buddhist terms and thoughts serves as a disjunction between language teaching and doctrine.

Limited resources only make the situation worse. Few academies have multimedia laboratories or digital educational platforms and class sizes are mostly more than 50 students thereby limiting the opportunities for speaking individually. The Presentation Skills course in the VNU Le (2025) witnessed, on the other hand, used interactive and F2F situations over 15 weeks when audio-visual media were applied as well as peer response. These are the conditions in which learner motivation and growth could thrive. The lack of such facilities in most Buddhist colleges means very limited availability for authentic communicative use.

3.4. Learner Profile and Motivation

The linguistic profile of Buddhist learners contrasts starkly with that of those from the secular domain. Most monastics go to the academy after several years of temple duty or from ordination training, when they are in their late 20s or thirties. They receive very little exposure to English in their secondary schools, especially in rural areas where temple life is the predominate way of life. The daily regime is mixed with educational courses and religious worship, which do not leave enough opportunity to self-study.

Their orientation toward learning English is predominantly instrumental rather than integrative. Monastic students usually only learn to speak English because they have to as part of their course study or because they want to undertake postgraduate studies overseas, and it is not necessarily

about a deeper interest in the culture that underpins the language. As observed by Le (2025, pp. 57–58), motivation is in close interrelation with affective factors like confidence and anxiety: Low motivation can heighten fear of failure wherein high anxiety may lower motivation. In monastic circles, this feedback loop is heightened by norms of modesty that discourage assertiveness. Therefore, even very able learners may be reluctant to take part in English using activities.

3.5. Psychological Barriers and Cultural Factors

The affective factors in evidence in ICTE 74 – anxiety, shyness and lack of confidence – are especially salient within Buddhist classrooms. Le (2025) noted Vietnamese learners frequently “lacking of words and do hesitate” when they speak English because the lack of psychological encouragement, not ignorance. Buddhist learners feel no differently, diversified by cultural paralysis. The spirit of humility (*khiêm hạ*) and respect for seniority, and detachment from compliments make speaking in public to be a morally delicate obligation. In an English Dharma talk before other monastics, a monk might be afraid of sounding presumptuous and a nun may have internalized social constraints telling her to hold back.

These are attitudes that together could be called ethical anxiety – a composite of linguistic nervousness and moral timidity. This obstacle requires pedagogical tact to be overcome. Teachers should model speaking English not as an act of self-display but of fellow-feeling, linking the *wācā* to Buddhist concepts of right speech (*sammā vācā*). People can then reframe their understanding of how discourses should be enacted. This has the power to reduce cognitive dissonance, but it also means that the very practice of communicating becomes a mode of spiritual conditioning.

3.6. Structural and Environmental Constraints

Outside of classroom teaching, the wider sociolinguistic community in Vietnamese monasteries provides little access to English. Rites, sermons and community maintenance are conducted in Vietnamese or Pāli with the exception of a few prayers. Among the collection, mostly vietnamese commentaries can be found and few subscribes to english buddhist magazines. Without sinking into it, we lose the language. And even students who are able to read and write after they’ve already attended English courses, they somehow, when not practicing it, forget their language skills.

On the other hand, monks and nuns at the Buddhist College in Singapore live in a bilingual environment where daily interactions in English between preceptors (monks and nuns), lay volunteers, overseas lecturers, as well as visitors are common. Likewise, at Thailand s International Buddhist Studies College, English is the medium of instruction and

the social glue for students, forming a language system that feeds on itself. Vietnamese institutions, on the other hand, are still linguistically insular—a closed loop of Vietnamese communication amid English classes that rarely extend beyond controlled parameters.

3.7. Unclear Policies and Lack of Universality

Nationally, B1 is the lowest language standard prescribed by Vietnam’s Six-Level Foreign Language Proficiency Framework for university students. But Buddhist colleges, not all of which are fully state-accredited, are uneven in their application. Some schools make no formal diagnosis at the time of entry; others give informal oral tests. There are no such regulations from any established institution for me to pass an exit English at the level B2 / ELTS 5.5 as required by many of my international Buddhist universities etc. The absence of policy match makes invalid program effects.

Le (2025)’s article can be seen as an implicit demonstration of the gains that could be obtained with rigorous implementation: B1-level students followed a well-scaffolded and teacher-led 15-week course in theory-into-practice that resulted in quite some visible progress and measurement results that have not been called into question (pp. 61–63). This same strategy in Buddhist institutions would do wonders for accountability and engagement. But without any regulatory compulsion, English proficiency is again a matter of personal drive not institutional framework.

3.8. Emerging Innovations and Prospects

While these are tough times, innovation is starting to reveal itself. Ah Long (pseudonym), a Buddhist, learned English during short-term workshops at the Ho Chi Minh City Academy in which international textbooks, including those of *Buddhist English* (edited by Suwanrat & Thompson 2022) were employed and sometimes foreign lecturers came for some days. Hue Academy experimented online cooperation translation project with temples in Thailand and Sri Lanka. Whilst these are small, they at least signify that the importance of English as a medium of international communication is increasing.

What’s more, when young monks and nuns start to see English as a spiritual implement rather than a teenage academic chore. Motivated by outreach through social media and international Dharma teachings, they want to bring Vietnamese Buddhist culture to the world. This change of heart — from duty to calling — could become the motivational wellspring for something grander.

3.9. Synthesis

In conclusion, the teaching of English at Vietnamese Buddhist institutions is subject to limited resources, other schools of thought or courses and lack of institutional

encouragement. Little success is achieved in a context of grammar-translation approach, absence of a benchmark for the proficiency and adequate lack exposure to In Real Life (IRL) communication. The psychological factors described by Phan Thi Ngoc Le (2025)—namely, anxiety, shyness, lack of confidence and low motivation—are amplified by monastic cultural norms which praise humility and silence. Organisational constraints, such as limited resources and non-accreditation status, sustain these weaknesses.

It's a moving target, though. There are some signs of change, but they only reflect a possibility for future revival: incremental reforms and new outlooks among younger monastics. In order to realize this potential, Vietnamese Buddhist education must reconfigure its idea of English as a fundamental mechanism of Buddhist studies and the communication of dharma, employing integrated pedagogical models and achievable standards. Then and only then, it will be able to fill the gulf: increasingly wide between domestic and "overseas" Buddhist scholars.

IV. A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON INTERNATIONAL BUDDHIST UNIVERSITIES

4.1. Rationale for Comparison

For an evaluation of the place of English-language education within Vietnamese Buddhist institutes, we must also consider other examples from Buddhist Universities in Asia and the West that have incorporated English into their programmes. In comparison, the spectrum of policy and education philosophies claim not only very different educational policies but also contrasting views of the relationship between linguistic competence and religious scholarship. The five case studies—Singapore, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Australia and the United States also illustrate this progression from bilingual or co-existence models of teaching and learning to full-fledged English medium instruction. Together, these cases illustrate the structural and cultural conditions under which English proficiency flourishes in Buddhist higher education.

4.2. Singapore: Bilingualism as Institutional DNA

The bilingual Buddhist education in Singapore is a model for the Muslim holy state to follow. The Buddhist College of Singapore (BCS) operates under the Ministry of Education's bilingual policy, which maintains English as an official language alongside Chinese. English as the language of instruction All universities, regardless of their religious affiliation, are affected or influenced by national policies on English as the language of instruction.

English is immersed throughout all levels of learning at BCS. BA in Buddhist Studies After completing either high school or the equivalent, students enter a two-year English

Foundation Program before entering the four-year Bachelor of Arts in Buddhist Studies. After receiving that fundamental education, they enter academic courses, which are taught mostly in English. The faculty has published and lectured in both languages and the library contains Pāli-Sanskrit/English canon translations. This also follows from if the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach: English is no longer a subject of study to learn by heart, but a means to read, hear and understand Buddhist philosophy.

Why is Singapore's Model effective? The effectiveness of the model in Singapore can be attributed to three related factors. One, a strong national education policy that mandates uniform teacher training and accreditation or other standards in assessment such as equivalence to IELTS or CEFR. Second, the sociolinguistic context of English outside the classroom is one in which both languages are used and in fact are reinforced by temples, lay associations and media. Third, the college's culture values English as a critical competency for Dharmaservice and enables Singaporean monastics to extend their outreach internationally. As a result, the postgraduate profile that BCS has established joins deep doctrinal knowledge with polished informetric skill—a combination that Vietnamese schools also hope to cultivate, but have (so far) put in place only partially.

4.3. Thailand: The Monastic University System as a Medium for Internationalization

Thailand Second, and in some respects intermediate, there is a model of internationalisation on offer by Thailand. The two primary Buddhist universities, MCU (Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University) and MBU (Mahamakut Buddhist University) have parallel programs in Thai language and English language. For example, in the DDM shedra-IBS model developed at MCU, EMI represents the strategic integration of English Medium Instruction (EMI) in a traditional monastic university.

This applies to all IBSC programmes at the bachelor's, masters and doctoral levels of study; courses are taught in English and you must be able to prove your proficiency through a documented proficiency (i.e. IELTS – 5.5 or equivalent). Its curriculum has been designed to meet international academic requirements, including Buddhist hermeneutics, philosophy, and education industry courses and research method modules with a focus on English academic writing. The faculty is complemented by visiting international lecturers who work in cooperation with the Thai monks, thus creating a culturally and linguistically diverse atmosphere.

It is also in line with Thailand's national tourism and cultural export policy, as MCU has developed its own

model of internationalization that views English language learning (ELL) as a tool to exert soft power. Fluent English-speaking monks have important functions in the interchange of faith traditions, international missionary work, and educational diplomacy. On the other hand, while Vietnamese Buddhist education is embedded in a policy environment that is less internationalised, it has not yet fused English instruction with national cultural strategy. MCU demonstrates that when the learning of English is institutionally valued as academic and civic capital, capacities for proficiency accrue naturally.

4.4. Sri Lanka: Colonial Inheritance and Forced English

The Buddhist and Pali University in Sri Lanka (BPU) is an epitome of past heritage and present change. Thanks to colonial history, English has been a working language for learning in Sri Lanka and for some faculties — as per BPU's own regulations — it is either the main or second medium of instruction. English for Buddhist Studies is a compulsory module on the first year and students are then eligible to study more specialized courses like Academic Writing and English Translation of Pāli Texts. English is invariably used to teach and submit thesis in graduate studies.

The Unique case of the Sri Lankan situation is a linguisticization. In Sri Lanka, English does not stand outside as a foreign and elitist target added to the already existing academic fabric of everyday life; it co-exists with Sinhala and also Pāli. This trilingual environment promotes a growing frequency of exposure and, applying the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky (Vygotsky 1978), has a beneficial effect on learning by doing in natural settings with humans. And the nation's interuniversity partnerships — especially with Buddhist institutions in Singapore and Malaysia — foster transnational communities of practice. By contrast, Vietnamese academies are still linguistically monolithic, leaving students with no such collective niche.

4.5. Australia: English as Academic Legitimacy

In Australia, an educated nation that uses English as the language of and for academic study, the Nan Tien Institute (NTI) is a model that demonstrates how Buddhist higher education can necessarily be on par with universities in a secular context without losing its religious dimension. NTI is registered with the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) and is held accountable for language literacy, research ethics and quality of teaching. It is all taught in English, but the entry requirement for non-native speakers is at least IELTS 6.5 (at TEQSA, 2023).

As a pedagogical strategy, NTI combines Buddhist wisdom teachings with Western scholastic approaches such as

critical analysis, rigor of evidence and peer-reviewed publication. Students produce analytical essays, research reports, and reflective journals entirely in English, internalizing these patterns of scholarly communication. In this sense then English isn't just a resource; it is the currency through which academic credibility is established. Accordingly, we are producing graduates who can contribute to global conversations on a number of fronts in areas such as religious studies, ethics and mindfulness research.

In the context of ABET education for Vietnamese Buddhists, the NTI model illustrates the impact external accreditations can have. Since the teaching of English must comply with national standards, it is budgeted, managed and evaluated regularly—procedures that do not often accompany Vietnamese self-regulated education in Vietnam. Beyond this, though, it shows how external accountability can be an effective lever for ongoing language growth.

4.6. United States: Blending of Buddhism and Western Pedagogy

In North America institutions like the University of the West (UWest) in California and Institute of Buddhist Studies (IBS) at Graduate Theological Union represent Buddhism in mainstream English-language academics, alongside schools that are generalizing access to knowledge and learning for lay students. Both are accredited by the WSCUC, and follow the United States tradition of a liberal arts education. They have faculty from Asia, Europe and the United States who teach Buddhist doctrine as well as general education and research techniques.

The pedagogical model privileges attentive inquiry, discussion-based learning, and argumentative writing. Students are assessed by essays or presentations and peer-reviewed projects—modes of assessment that naturally presuppose highly developed linguistic skills. A monastic student shares classroom banter and social networks with lay people of all religious persuasions, an interaction that promotes dialogue between cultures and reduces communicative apprehension. Vietnamese though are socially homogeneous, with hierarchical monastic environments and so the chances for English as an egalitarian interaction are less.

From a policy perspective, both UWest and IBS show that it can be advantageous to fit into the national higher education systems for language learning outcomes. All of these are state-accredited degrees, operating under federal financial aid regulations, and therefore require English proficiency as a condition of enrollment, while also affording it as the outcome. The partial independence of Vietnamese academies from the state's management

structure serves to protect doctrinal conservatism, but it also insulates academies from these systemic quality levers.

4.7. Comparative Synthesis

A comparison of the five examples highlights a strong change in institutionalization scale of English as an instruction language:

Country/Institution	Medium of Instruction	Entry Requirement	Quality Assurance	Linguistic Environment
Singapore (BCS)	Bilingual (English / Chinese)	Foundation English Program	National MOE standards	Fully bilingual society
Thailand (MCUIBSC)	Fully English	IELTS $\geq$ 5.5	University + government oversight	International monastic community
Sri Lanka (BPU)	English + Sinhala	Compulsory English I	State university system	Trilingual academic culture
Australia (NTI)	English only	IELTS $\geq$ 6.5	TEQSA accreditation	Native English society
United States (UWest / IBS)	English only	TOEFL / IELTS	WSCUC accreditation	Multicultural, English dominant

From this analysis, three generalizations arise:

1. **Policy Alignment:** Institutions connected to national educational systems that maintain formal language policies: Singapore, Thailand and Australia show the greatest proportions of English proficiency among monastic students over more isolated/purely religious or independently administered centers.
2. **Functional Integration:** English used as a tool of learning content rather than an end in itself enhances sustainable competence among learners.
3. **Cultural Enrichment:** The native-like proficiency of the bilingual or multilingual environment provides continuous exposure to English language and readily leads to reinforcement of this language in the classroom.

Vietnamese Buddhist establishments, in this context, fall at the farthest end of the integration continuum. But here language learning is most evidently marginal, there are few clear standards of competence in English and the linguistic environment continues to be overwhelmingly monolingual. The comparative findings thus provide empirical support for this paper's main contention, which is that there exists a direct link between English proficiency and the degree to which institutions structure and embed English in both their cultural and epistemic infrastructures.

4.8. Implications for Vietnam

The insights offered by a wide-ranging collection of international experiences are rich and tangible food for thought for the reforms that will be necessary. The exemplary records of Singapore, Thailand emerging

directly for... Clearly, the realities of partial English as a Medium Instruction (EMI) realisation in terms of action within the contextually rich and culturally diverse landscape of Asia are vibrant. Sri Lanka offers a good exemplar of how its past bilingualism can be critically utilized and used to depict, for comparison's sake, education as it is now. In addition, the examples of Australia and the US are excellent illustrations of the many advantages of external accreditation and rigorous accountability that facilitate quality in education.

These various models taken together, in the case of Viet Nam as a whole, suggest that the way to modernize language is not a priori one in which one either has spiritual authenticity or is required to sacrifice it. Quite the opposite: judicious incorporation of English in education has potential to revitalize Buddhist education, make essential inroads into the dynamic global discourse on ethics, mindfulness and cross cultural understanding.

What ultimately brings these impressive success stories together is not just the sheer accumulation of experience in learning English, but its qualitative change: it becomes an instrument of intellectual liberation and freedom. When Vietnamese Buddhist academies fully embrace this modern paradigm—enacting genuinely progressive policy overalls, integrating curriculums with sincerity and depth, and providing students placeholder page with the psychological resources to meet these changes—they will no longer remain institutionally trapped in insular preservationism, but emerge as full partners in the burgeoning global renewal.

V. THE GAP, INSTITUTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

5.1 Institutional Structures and Resource Inequality

A critical structural constraint for Vietnamese buddhists who do not possess proficiency in English is the institutional fragmentation of the education. The country's leading Buddhist academies are part of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, now out-of-synch with the national ministry of higher education's internationalization moves. Consequently, the quality of their English is not assured by standards required at state level (such as exit requirements that are IELTS or CEF aligned). By comparison, institutions such as those in Thailand, Sri Lanka and Singapore are all either state-chartered or accredited by regional agencies that make it a graduation requirement to be able to demonstrate proficiency in at least one foreign language.

And the difference in resources only adds to the burden to these schools. Facilities Buddhist schools in richer countries Yes No have access to digital libraries, multimedia labs and visiting faculty programs which go a long way in contributing towards creating an English language ecosystem. By contrast, Vietnamese schools with their limited funds and voluntary lecturers find it hard to have such a condition. The importance of the physical learning space is underscored in a VC account (Le, 2025, p. 61) which had "a particularly successful course", Presentation Skills that was conducted over 15 weeks on campus and was entirely face to face allowing students to receive ongoing feedback. On the other hand, there are numerous Buddhist academies that do provide exposure to English in large classes or over weekends but with limited speaking practice.

5.2 Pedagogical Philosophy and Monastic Learning Environment

Vietnamese monastic education is deeply entrenched in the transmission model, including techniques such as recitation practices, memory work and interpretation. These are indeed helpful methods for learning scripture, however they may not be all that valuable when it comes to developing communicative proficiency. Findings Based on the analysis of ICTE 74, all students who improved their presentation skills modelled through feedback and practice through repeated discussion as well as peer correction from task-based activity (Le, 2025, pp. 6264) They are not dissimilar ranging from the tenets of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) theory, but infrequently found practiced in Buddhist academies. When the focus becomes purely cognitive, this results in a judicious approach to language study that values precision over fluency and treats individual expression as secondary to the demands of the gazette.

Teacher qualification is another important factor affecting this educational picture. A lot of English teachers in Buddhist schools are monks who have a Masters degree in Buddhist Studies, not TESOL. These educators may be spiritually committed but less experienced in current SLA methods (scaffolding, formative assessment delivery), the latter being even extended control mechanisms against anxiety. The ICTE findings reveal the role of teacher feedback and a supportive classroom in reducing psychological obstacles (Le, 2025:5759). Such support or affirmation not being given, the hesitation of monastic disciples is likely to grow.

5.3 Psychological Factors for Monastic Students Only

The anxiety-shyness-low confidence-low motivation (ICTE 74) construct is particularly well suited to understanding the 'real' lives of monastic students. Buddhist monks are taught to smother ego and reject opulence. And when used in the context of learning languages it generates inhibitions with respect to speaking that stem from fears about sounding immodest or making errors in front of others. Brown (2001) and Gebhard (2006) have earlier recognized shyness, anxiety of being evaluated are potential factors that obstruct oral proficiency; Le (2025) also noted the same problem in Vietnamese university classrooms. Monastic Mind Games In monasteries, these psychological barriers may be compounded by a culture of deference, novices who are afraid to talk in front of elders or seniors, lessening their ability to practice.

Second, the motivation of monks is quite different from that of lay learners. Although lay learners often study English in order to support their future careers, monastics may be less inclined to expect a pragmatic return on their investment in language learning, particularly if they plan to take up residence within the community. In the absence of proximal instrumental goals, intrinsic motivation decreases. But Buddhist teachings also contribute a counterbalancing motivation: the Bodhisattva ideal of compassionate utterance (*karuṇāvākya*) can be reconstructed to see English as a tool that generates global compassion and transmits teachings – link that many education programmes have yet to clarify.

5.4 Sociolinguistic Environment

Language acquisition and performance are also important with respect to environmental exposure. In places like Singapore and Sri Lanka, English is a co-official language consecrating bilingual practices even during religious encounters. For example, temple discussions are typically carried out in English and local languages, creating a diverse language atmosphere. Vietnamese monastics, on the other hand, live in a mostly Vietnamese-speaking

environment, where English is confined primarily to the classroom. If the language is not heard every day, the delay of its use makes the development of their capacity slower and produces attrition (knowledge loss) and fossilization (maintenance of mistakes). This kind of environmental deficit offers a compelling way to address the question of why many hard-working learners fail to develop fluent production.

VI. COUNTERARGUMENTS AND REBUTTAL

6.1 "The weakness of English is not a vice but cultural priority"

An often repeated justification is that Vietnamese Buddhist institutions simply want to maintain Pāli, Sanskrit or Classical Chinese literature as main language of the sacred texts and give English second place. This cultural view of the world is not wrong but it fails to consider a profound epistemic revolution taking place in international Buddhist studies. Today, works on the classics of the world and theories about translation and comparative philosophy take place, overwhelmingly in English. To fail to recognise this is potentially to submit interpretive authority to foreign academics. As a result, linguistic conservatism that neglects English unknowingly marginalizes Vietnamese intellectuals within the global Buddhist conversation.

6.2 "Vietnamese Are Born Being Shy"

The findings of the ICTE 74 study that LeIngram., pp.5758) rejects also question about the Vietnameseness of shyness: They adduced evidence each craintif veient (have had no reason to fear), there was a further dimension involved in explanation. The study presents situational factors that dominate student's engagement, and suppose the fear of making mistakes, anxiety over negative evaluations, and insufficient support in the classroom as major influences on their engagement. Incorporation of practice with peer feedback into the VNU course led to a significant elevation in student confidence. Therefore, the solution is not a cultural determinism but an intelligent rethinking of pedagogy – a necessary approach for the monastic educational environment.

6.3 "English Is Subordinated to Spiritual Practice"

Some monks argue that it is not talk but devotion which is the foundation of Buddhist education. Yet, historical fact demonstrates that the importance of language skills to the preservation and dissemination of the Dharma has been a constant factor in its history from its Sanskritization in India, through Sinicization in China, into our own Anglicized age. Each language change has expanded the spheres of Dharma's influence. English now fills the same instrumental role. Teaching in English is not the

Westernisation of Buddhism, it is making the teachings universal, more accessible to people everywhere in the world.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REFORM

7.1 Implement Stages of tasks in the EMI/CLIL Classroom

Buddhist institutions of higher learning must introduce integrated English-medium modules in hybrid mode with doctrinal content by language method. For instance, a class on *The Life of the Buddha* could include reading in English combined with assessments that motivate bilingual thinking. This gradual EMI integration will serve break to the language down as a cognitive weapon, rather than a punish for outside.

7.2 Institute Standardized Benchmarks

A national partnership of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha and ministry of education should set up standard input and output levels in line with CEFR- preferably, B1 for entering and B2 as it was proposed by Le (2025) in terms of VNU model. The introduction of outside testing would encourage uniform standards of instruction while enhancing portability of credit world wide.

7.3 Professionalize Teacher Training

Monastic English teachers need to earn systematic TESOL credentials or integrate with lay universities to upgrade their teaching licence. Training should include best practices for providing psychological support also specified in ICTE 74: systematic feedback, anxiety reduction exercises, and peer review (Le et al., 2025, pp. 59-64). This 'training into empathy' would make for better, more empathetic teachers with a methodologically sound education in the classroom.

7.4 Create an English-Medium Monastic Context

"Pasta lessons," bilingual sermons, and exchange programs can help transform passive knowledge into active language skills. Successful models from Thailand and Sri Lanka have shown that immersion can lead to religious fluency. Collaborating with English-speaking monasteries or interacting with online communities might provide meaningful communicative practice.

7.5 Integrate Psychological Literacy in the Curriculum

Expanding on the ICTE 74 affective barriers categorization, Buddhist schools need to provide workshops in mindful communication and language confidence strategies. The task of balancing language development and meditation can be further facilitated by appropriating the process of anxiety reduction into a particular variety of bhāvanā, or mental cultivation.

7.6 infrastructure and Research Infrastructure

Monastics will read what is written in English if you subsidize the purchase or licensing of digital libraries, open access journals, and translation projects. Joint partnerships with institutions like MCU or NTI might lead to joint publications and faculty exchange, allowing Vietnamese scholars to become part of global networks.

VIII. CONCLUSION

What this does, is divide the Two Vehicles between Vietnamese Buddhist institutions and World Buddhism. The gap in the English levels of their students scholars is not a given nor an impossible task. The findings— especially Le's (2025) psychological and pedagogical insights— suggest that communicative inadequacy results from systemic weaknesses rather than spiritual deficiency. Such an instrumental view of English has restricted the scope of learning, but where it is used as a language of inquiry, such as in Singapore, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Australia and USA, monks can develop into cosmopolitan scholars.

Accordingly, reform requires both a structural (curricula structure, resources) as well as a psychological (faith in oneself and motivation) turnaround. In Vietnamese Buddhist education, English should be recontextualized as not a foreign imposition but a compassionate instrument—a modern-day upāya (skilful means)—of spreading the Dharma across boundaries. In this way, linguistic 'enlightenment' is a form of spiritual enlightenment, which enables people to communicate openly and honestly with the rest of the world.

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Narratives of Endurance: Representation of Women in Odia Literature

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Abstract— Over centuries the status of women in Odisha has been shaped by factors like patriarchal mindset, domestic violence, child marriage, poverty, superstitions, trafficking, migration, female feticide, unpaid labour and even low female literacy levels. Irrespective of the presumably improved status in contemporary society, women in Odisha are subject to discrimination and myriad challenges. Striding through their violation of rights as well as adverse family and societal circumstances in ancient, medieval and modern times, several women in Odia fiction and folklore demonstrate resilience. By analysing ancient, medieval and contemporary Odia literary works in English translation, my research focuses on the conditions, predicament and tenacity of women to understand their journey by battling patriarchal barriers and gender stereotypes.



Keywords— woman characters, tenacity, Odisha, fiction, folklore, English translation

I. INTRODUCTION

Simone de Beauvoir once said: “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman.” Odia women's identity is shaped not just by their society and culture but also by their resilience. Have you ever wondered why most festivals in Odisha encourage fasting by women? If you look at Savitri Puja, Prathamastami, Khudurukuni, Kumar Purnima, Sudasa Brata and other such festivals, the rituals involve women attempting to placate gods and goddesses for the well-being of their husbands, brothers, children and family. Women in Odisha are encouraged to make sacrifices and deal with adverse situations. Remarkably amid the hardships and hurdles, the power of women to beat all odds also serves as an example of their resilience. The tenacity of Odia women is also reflected in the folktales, legends and fiction through the ages. This research paper analyses the adverse circumstances of fictional women characters of Odia literature in English translation and how they overcome those through their strength of character and emerge empowered.

II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To study how Odia literature in English translation depicts the resilience of women through characters, narratives, and their reactions to adverse situations.
- To appreciate the ways in which women protagonists battle patriarchal circumstances, social stigmas, and/or personal struggles in Odia literature and how these are presented or interpreted while being rendered into English.
- To recognise how strong women characters in Odia literature in English translation confront traditional gender roles and social pressures in rural and urban contexts.
- To bring to the fore feminist subjects within Odia literature that portray women's resilience, examining how these unfold through translation and their relevance in worldwide discourses.
- To understand how the description of resilient women in Odia literature has developed in pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial eras, especially in response to historical, religious, social, political and economic

situations, and how these changes are painted in translations.

III. METHODOLOGY

This research has employed a qualitative research design and interpretative approach to analyse strong woman characters of writers like Binapani Mohanty, Godabarisha Mishra, Fakir Mohan Senapati, Gopinath Mohanty, Devika Rangachari, Suprabha Kar, Gayatri Sharaf, Aratibala Prusty, Rabi Patnaik and others to understand how they show resilience. A close textual reading has been done to interpret their challenging circumstances by reading into their dialogues, actions, characteristics and relationships. Their character mapping has been done by interpreting their motivation, challenges and transformation, cultural contexts and historical evolution. Feminist literary theory has been used to evaluate how these strong woman characters form a resistance to patriarchal structures.

IV. STRONG WOMEN CHARACTERS IN ODIA NARRATIVES

4.1. Prithvimahadevi

The story of Prithvimahadevi in Devika Rangachari's *Queen of Earth* best epitomizes the life of a woman caught in the web of patriarchy along with her yearning for something larger. The circumstances, especially in relation to 8th-10th century Odisha under the Bhauma dynasty, bring to light the situation of women within the privileges that must have been bestowed on them.

In the image of Prithvimahadevi, weaning and socialisation prepares her to understand how a woman can exercise her power and fulfil her potential while remaining politically dependent and submissive to the order of patriarchy. She questions the accepted male supremacy by these lines: "Are women any less intelligent than men? Are they not capable of holding the reins and discharging responsibilities? I am no less than Yayati, although society dictates that he be considered worthier because he is a man. I know that I am more resourceful and courageous than him, at least verbally. I have just not had the opportunity to test myself, to see how far I can go." (Rangachari 28)

She explicitly states that, like Yayati, she was also stuck in the male-dominated society, which did not give her the chance to showcase her skills. This claim of her wish to be acknowledged equal to a man is the experience of this author and many women who have existed in history but could not exercise their agency simply because of their sex. It is revealed in Prithvimahadevi's reflections that she is a woman of strong personality, willing to break the ceiling.

The inner tension of Prithvimahadevi escalates with the perception of her surroundings in a palace full of claustrophobic security. She is both physically and metaphorically imprisoned within the patriarchal frames of her existence. It also deepens with the anxieties of her prospective marriage, wherein she senses how the domestic life is going to imprison her.

Prithvimahadevi's awareness of becoming a political tool in her father's designs to advance in society is unsettling at first. However, her aunt explains how politics and marriage alliances usually involve women to be used as bargaining chips in familial power strategies; they were blindsided about how little authority women had in politics. Here is where Prithvimahadevi shatters their perception of her and sets out to peace. The realisation of a woman being devoid of choice other than as a misplaced watcher shatters the preconceptions. Accepting the reality of one's position is not an indication of accepting defeat, rather it is a clever way of controlling one's situation in a messy political sphere undoubtedly dominated by men. When things do not go her way like in this case, she first gets disappointed and frustrated but afterwards Prithvimahadevi is able to compose herself as someone who possesses emotional and political strength. The phrase "My anger eventually thins down to a dull resignation," shows her immense mental strength and resilience, ready to face future hurdles with grit and courage.

Her claim to fame and ultimate strategy was ascending to power after the death of Shivakara, proving that she possesses the toughness to prevail over personal tragedies all the while dutifully fulfilling the role of leader. When it comes to the havoc she displays restraint to a degree and embodies empathy and humanity to a level where she does not deeply damage her relationship with the children of Shivakara - Dhruva and Kusuma.

The life of Prithvimahadevi as a leader revolves around balancing personal goals, family duties, and the overarching politics of the land. As she aspires to rule and is ambitious to lead the Bhaumakaras, it is evident that she is hampered by the emotional attachments she bares towards family as well as lingering old love. Luckily, she is an exceedingly capable leader in the sense that she is able to mix sentiments and diplomacy exceptionally well. That was her main challenge - to be accepted by a group of people whose father overthrew their leader. Even when taunted by Shivakara's wife, she remains steadfast in her values and leadership ambitions. Prithvimahadevi's character in *Queen of Earth* is a pioneering figure balancing gender and power dynamics of her time.

4.2 Basanti

Like Prithvimahadevi, Basanti is also a strong and unconventional woman. Though not a traditional rebel, she was a deeply-nuanced woman who had a different way of approaching life. In the beginning, she was focused on social ideals, but she steers away from risk without losing her self-esteem or philanthropic values. For Basanti, the house of her husband and in-laws was no less a battleground where she had to accept 'outmoded customs' and bow to every dictate of her mother-in-law, without her desire in it. She bravely endured the insults of Debabrata's relatives because she belonged to a low caste.

Basanti's ideas on the roles of women are progressive for her time. Though her English education might have made her liberal, her mother-in-law made that very same factor seem like a fault. She did not bow down to the daily humiliation she had to face: "His [Debabrata's] mother was busy finding fault with the daughter-in-law; the entire village was awash with criticism of her." (Ray 87) The slander against Basanti increased when she opened a school: "The news of Basanti's opening a school created a stir among the traditionalists in the village...What greater shame could there be than for a newly-married woman to walk openly along the village road?" (Ray 108)

Views of Basanti and her husband Debabrata on the liberation of women did not match. Sadly, Basanti realised her husband believed that..."men should dominate women, to a lesser or greater degree." (Ray 115). Though their opinions were opposed to each other, still Basanti never for once let that affect her goals, aspirations or relationship with her husband. Basanti embodies the complexity of women's roles in a changing society that she showcases with wisdom, self-awareness, and a commitment to social change.

4.3 Rebati

The predicament of Rebati is one of resilience and determination in the face of harsh opposition showcasing the conflict between tradition and progress in a society that confined women's roles to domestic chores. Rebati refused to be perturbed in her quest of education despite being constantly blamed by her grandmother for the misfortunes that befell their family.

Rebati, however, had a deep curiosity and love for learning from a young age. She would eagerly listen to the religious texts her father read, like the *Bhagavat*, and was drawn to the prospect of acquiring knowledge. She was particularly inspired by the example of Jhankar Pattanaik's daughters, who could read religious texts, which gave her the courage to defy her family's orthodoxical take on women's education.

Rebati had to fight against the societal expectations of women and the stereotypical gender roles that confined them to household duties. But Rebati's unwavering determination to study, shows her resilience in the face of adverse circumstances like family beliefs and epidemic. Rebati ultimately succumbing to cholera may point to the persistent belief of her grandmother coming true but she transcended her time and age by her aspiration of intellectual and social mobility, that often comes with a price.

Rebati challenged the gender norms of her time and her defiance against oppressive gender roles and traditions as well as her undying quest for knowledge and education sends a transformative message. Her story shows that even if the personal and social sacrifices often accompany defiance of a woman in a conventional society, it highlights the importance of education in empowering women and reshaping societal expectations.

4.4. Pata Dei

No one in Pata Dei's village thought she could have been suffering for all the years that she was missing from her in-laws place. A victim of gang rape, Pata Dei shows her tenacity by keeping mum and becoming "indifferent, apathetic" to all the unnecessary allegations probing her character and conjectures about her disappearance: "The past three years seemed like ages now. It was difficult to remember bygone events. People who knew nothing started fabricating facts...Pata, the daughter of Jaggu, has come back with a child. Must be her own. Why else should she have the child around? Shameless, sinful woman. She abandoned a handsome, gentle husband. Couldn't stay on with her father either. Had to run away with someone in the middle of the night." (Mohanty 41)

It takes great guts to own in public your child born out of rape. The reticent and stoical Pata Dei is at first calm but she becomes aggressive and volatile when the mother-in-law of Mani Bhauja provoked her sensibilities by saying: "Aye! Do you have a frog in your mouth? Speak up. You could not stay even for a month with your in-laws. You ate up your father alive. And now you say the earth has given you this child? Speak the truth. Who is the father of this child? Otherwise, I myself will cut you to pieces before the day is over. Don't you know my anger?" (Mohanty 43)

Pata Dei's strength lies in her ability to co-exist with her rapists in the same village, without alleging them or confronting them, unless she had to under dire provocation. Though Pata Dei knew about her perpetrators, she chose to remain quiet. She revealed nothing, not because of cowardice but perhaps to buy peace and allow everyone to remain worry-free. Perhaps, in her mind, the sanctity of the village and society was also at stake. A brave and

empowered woman is not always the one who fights for justice, but also the one who waits for the opportune moment to reveal about her exploitation and it also happens at a point in time when the patience of the woman reaches the threshold limit. The anagnorisis comes at the moment when the old woman put her foot on Pata Dei's neck and she started gasping for breath. The irony is when she was physically intimidated, "she felt a surge of strength". Who is the father of the child, was actually not possible to determine in a gang-rape incident. She revealed: "You want to know who the father of the child is? There, they are all standing here. Ramu, Veera, Gopi, Naria, and a couple more. How can I tell whose child this is? That night, during the Dola festival when the mock fight was going on, these men stuffed a cloth in my mouth and carried me away to the edge of the graveyard. There, behind the bushes, they chewed me alive....like plucking flesh from bones...How can I tell whose child this is? Ask that Hari Bauri. He took money from all of them to leave me at Cuttack. All this time, I didn't come back because I didn't want to bring more shame on my father. Since returning, I've revealed nothing. But ask them all now. Let them swear on themselves and decide who the father of this child is." (Mohanty 43)

4.5. Kamala

When her husband Sura drifted away to his colleague Chandramidha, Kamala wondered if the lost years of closeness, warmth and affection were real or an illusion- a mirage? Kamala's ability to tolerate her husband's hypocrisy is laudable. Sura laughed at the idea of remarriage and quiet often preached against infidelity and straying away from wedlock, when suggested it; however, he basked in his extramarital affair. Kamala kept quiet knowing about her husband's infidelity because of her sickness- that reeks of her strength of mind. A part of her heart wishing her husband's happiness after her death shows her resilience despite her adverse conditions of illness and betrayal.

Sura compares Kamala with wives of other nations and belittles her and blames her for his lack of opportunities: "Kama, I could have gone places if only I'd a wife to help me out a little. Getting a D.Litt wouldn't have remained only a distant dream...Kama, you Indian women make good housewives but poor partners; mentally and academically you're all miles behind your husbands." (Mohanty 69) What apparently seems like the helplessness of Kamala is actually his ability to withstand pressure. It is her bravery to accept a loveless marriage, an unfaithful husband and an ailing body. Mohanty, through Kamala, brings out the resilience of many such Odia woman (even women across India) who have saved the institution of marriage, and thus contributed to the upkeep of a sacred social practice.

4.6. Sulochana

A women character who at first feels helpless and tolerates the alcoholism and debauchery of her husband, and then strikes back rising from victimhood also demonstrates resilience in her own way. Ironically, when Sulochana beats Chandramani with a broom and he develops boils on his body, she is not able to eat anything the next day: "She could see that the broom had left marks all over his body; blood had clotted in some of his bruises. "What have I done!" she cried disconsolately. "I beat my husband with a broom! What terrible fate will be mine!" She prayed to the Gods again and again, begging their forgiveness, tears streaming down her cheeks. She brought a bowl of linseed oil and gently rubbed the swellings." (Senapati 41).

As Sulochana rises from victimhood to empowerment, she also shows lot of tolerance and hope towards her husband's transition from a drunken and debauch to a reformed man. Her resilience lies in her hope of transformation of her husband, despite his spoilt lifestyle and habits. Patriarchy has ingrained in the mind of a wife that she should deify her husband. Hence, Sulochana feels guilty of trying to change her husband: "She kept weeping incessantly, praying to the Gods to forgive her sin." (Senapati 41)

4.7. Malati

Malati saves the job of the priest by moving away from her illegitimate child. Though the priest, in fatherly affection, never thinks of deserting her: "Today, I'll leave this temple, but I cannot leave my daughter." (Kar 21) Her ability to bear her 'fallen woman' status is her strength. The ironical part is, in a patriarchal society, no one bothers about the man who impregnated the woman: "Every door in the wide world was forever shut to me. Society, without any reflection on my sin, closed all roads and left me with only one option. On seeing the path, my entire being trembled with repulsion. Carrying the burden of all sins, I came away from there - society conferred on me, with great kindness, the title - a fallen woman! But the man, who took advantage of my pitiable condition and built this reputation for me is an esteemed gentleman in the eyes of the society." (Kar 19)

To a woman who had been spurned by her father the moment she was born, discriminated because of her skin colour, abused by her husband and lost her son, the benevolence of a fatherly figure like a priest was everything she could ask for. But in her sacrifice of forsaking the affection that she had been craving lifelong lies her grit and courage. She could not bear the old man's name getting tainted because of her: "What? In this old age you have to endure such humiliation for giving me shelter? Drive me away. Let me go off to some distant place. I can bear any amount of humiliation, even hatred, but I can't tolerate your humiliation on account of me!" (Kar 21)

4.8. Mulgi

The objectification of Mulgi in Rabi Patnaik's *Savitri* by the police is paradoxical because her honour is violated by the very persons who should have protected it. Defamatory phrases like 'a fine piece of goods' and 'crunchy little cucumber' among other 'unprintable obscenities' 'welcomed' her to the place that is supposed to safeguard a woman. Mulgi knew that her husband Salkhu was innocent, yet she had to beg in front of the police to release him from the lockup. Seeing her husband badly beaten, Mulgi forgot her identity as a woman: "Mulgi hardly registered the roving hands of the policeman." (Patnaik 118) What is even more sad is the husband that she was fighting for was also rude to her; his reaction to seeing her in the police station was not welcoming: "Go away. Run. And don't ever come again. He slumped down, his face between his hands." (Patnaik 118)

The police took full advantage of a helpless woman despite her making a statement like: "My husband knows nothing. Neither do I. All those leaders did come to our place in the evening, but they didn't tell us where they were going afterward." (Patnaik 118)

Though victimised and exploited, Mulgi's ability to tolerate her sufferings definitely comes from a strong-headed woman whose goal seems unwavering, no matter what the situation demands. She never for once thought what impact this would have on her husband. Would he be happy about his release at the cost of his wife's honour? Would she have to justify the need for her defilement in front of Salkhu? Though Mulgi was ruthlessly gang-raped, her only hope was "...at the end of the ordeal she'd take her husband home. She would keep the vow she had made to herself and snatch him back from the jaws of the tiger, like the mythological Savitri from the very hands of Yama, the god of death." (Patnaik 119)

The character of Mulgi shows to what extent a woman can go to save the life of her husband. The courage of Mulgi, in the face of such adversity, is unimaginable.

4.9. Bharati

When everyone was scared to talk about the murder scene, it was 11-year-old Bharati who, without batting an eyelid, bravely revealed to the police: "Sir! Sir! I have seen who did it! It was Bina Panda who stabbed Kuna Sahu." (Acharya 167). This attitude of Bharati had a dangerous repercussion; Bina Panda pledged to make her his wife: "I will make that truth-telling bitch my wife. Go and tell this to her father tomorrow. If he marries his daughter to someone else or sends her away, I will kill his other children." (Acharya 369) However, the valiant Bharati did not stop at that. When Bina Panda approached a 19-year-old for marriage, the first thing she did was go to the village

doctor to sterilize her so that she would not give birth to more villains/murderers like Bina Panda. She tells the doctor: "Doctor sahib! I am not a mad woman nor am I a woman of loose character. I come from a respectable family. My marriage is fixed with a murderer and my marriage will take place after a month. To save my family from being ruined, I agreed to marry this murderer. I do not mind being the wife of a murderer, but I can never bring myself to become the mother of killers and criminals, nor can I give birth to sons who are cowardly or impotent. The world is peopled by timid, spineless persons like you and murderous criminals like my would-be husband. Doctor sahib, please save me from such a terrible fate by sterilizing me. I want to remain a barren woman for the rest of my life." (Acharya 373)

To marry a criminal requires guts and many in the place of Bharati might have chosen to end their lives; however, she chooses to end his lineage. Such is the dauntless attitude of Bharati, that is both unconventional and laudable.

4.10. Nila Mastrani

The nerve of the educated young Brahmin woman Nila Mastrani to break out of the stereotype of the societal expectation of marrying within the caste framework is remarkable. At the cost of severing ties with her father and brother, Nila Mastrani marries Sebayat Madan Sethi of the washerman caste, and reduces herself to the drudgery and grind of washing dirty clothes of people daily. Though society bears it at a loss of a good teacher who could contribute more meaningfully to educating the community, Nila Mastrani does not look down upon washing clothes as a menial task. In fact, she even offers to wash the 'Baula Pata' of her brother's wife. Washing that saree also raised a hope in her mind that she would be able to meet her brother. Nila Mastrani brings her Brahmin brother to the lanes of the washerman colony, again daringly shattering the caste hierarchy of the society.

Whether Nila Mastrani was affected by the village gossip or not is debatable: "One said what happened was the fault of education, another said it was the fault of society and the third person said that neither education nor society was to blame, it was the fault of Nila Mastrani." (Mohapatra 270)

4.11. Amrita & Kumari

'A Mother from Kalahandi' is an interesting perspective about the lives of two strong women - one from the city and the other from remote Kalahandi. Amrita feels an 'excruciating pain' and 'her body was burning with the fire of humiliation' when she realised that her husband was buying young girls from Kalahandi to satiate his lust. Despite the betrayal in marriage, Amrita is strong-willed and decides to invest her energy in helping the girl go back to her village, rather than herself wallowing in self-pity. It

is a daring act by Amrita when she decides to keep the baby girl of Kumari with her, knowing fully well it is her husband's as well, and looking at her would remind her daily of his betrayal. It is the voice of her iron-will that said to Kumari:

"I'm taking your child to give her the rights she is entitled to. Just like my mother, the mother from Kalahandi bears the child in her womb, goes through the pain of labour, and feeds the baby with nectar from her body. Like their fellow Indians, the children from Kalahandi have the same right to love, food and clothing. They are not born to be sold." (Sharaf 144)

Likewise, Kumari displays her courage by confiding in Amrita her troubles, despite the threat that she would be sent off to Kalahandi by Swapnesh. The bravest thing she does is reveal her story to an absolute stranger when Amrita tells her: "You seem to be having some problem. Why don't you tell me? I am like a mother to you. Who is he? Who would sell you?" (Sharaf 140)

4.12. Gurei

Whether rapists being killed by an innocent person is wrong is an ethical question that Aratibala Prusty raises in 'The Worn-Out Bird'. Gurei's father lost his life trying to 'bring those scoundrels [who had raped his daughter] to justice, and Gurei also became a murderer killing the rapist of her daughter: "Before Gurei had time to reflect and decide if she was right or wrong in taking the life of a rapist, the police arrived and forcibly handcuffed her. She then realised that by stabbing the man to death in broad daylight, she had become a criminal in the eyes of the society. She was no longer the Gurei of the past. She was now a murderer." (Prusty 163)

Two innocent people faced punishment for trying to bring justice; however, the real culprits roamed scot-free and the police remarked: "Such incidents are not uncommon. Does anything change? Then why are you making such a fuss about it? Those boys are the spoilt children of important men. The politicians need them for their survival. We have been ordered by a higher authority to release them." (Prusty 159)

Gurei shows courage despite her unending adversities, including physical abuse of her drunken husband Raghu Nayak, whom she once thought as an ideal husband material - who had accepted her with her illegitimate daughter. Though she had gone to jail trying to give justice to her daughter, she could not protect her from the subsequent gang-rape and suicide.

Gurei is an empowered woman because she has the guts to go kill the man who ruined her daughter, despite knowing the consequences she would have to face for it. She could

not trust the police to give her justice remembering the plight of her father who dies fighting an endless battle for justice.

4.13. Lakshmi

Lakshmi belonging to the Balaram Gotra of Anantapur village of Odisha shows spine by fighting against the bride price prevalent in ancient Odia society. The community made it a mandate to quote higher bride price for a woman with greater beauty and maturity. But Lakshmi never swelled in pride because of her abilities and appearance. Rather, she was brave enough to express her displeasure (to both her father and husband) against the prevalent practice of bride price, and stood firmly against it. Though her father took great pride in her daughter's ability to fetch a good bride price, Lakshmi shattered his dreams when she returned the amount of Rs.700 to her husband. She was bold enough to criticise her father: "Shame on you Father! If you had sold me for 700 rupees and taken the money, what a sin that would have been! You have no son - I am both son and daughter to you. I shall take care of you for all the time to come. When you go on a fast, I shall feed you. You have enough money, Father; please give up your greed and do not thirst for more." (Bal 249)

To her husband Narayan, she said: "I have read somewhere that it is wrong for a bride to allow herself to be sold for money. It was also what my teacher taught me in school." (Bal 251).

4.14. Ketaki

When Moti's father told Ketaki: "You'd better go home. You're a woman. What can you do here?", he could not fathom what steel Ketaki was made up of. Not everyone feels deeply about the death of an acquaintance who is not even related by blood. But Ketaki understood the dangers of such rowdy young men roaming free for young girls (including her own daughters). She never deliberated for a split second whether she should fight back or not: "If Moti could die because of a cursed woman like Ketaki, could Ketaki not fight against all odd? Would she have to carry the burden of this debt for all time? All of a sudden her own life seemed meaningless." (Mohanty 59)

It was not that Ketaki had not measured the repercussion of attacking the young men responsible for the death of Moti. But the guilt that Moti probably died because of the narrative she had shared with Moti killed her from inside. Ketaki could have ignored the death of Moti and gone her way, but her fearless spirit led her to avenge her murder: "...when those young men had their fill of drinks and dropped down drunk to the floor, she had poured out the gasoline from the can, lighted a match, and locked on the door, carefully latching it from the outside. The debighara had barely caught fire when a young man came rushing

from somewhere and tried frantically to open the latch. It was then that Ketaki had sliced through him with an axe. The head had rolled away from the man's body and came to rest besides the boulders. She sat on the boulder and kept chopping." (Mohanty 62)

Moti was not related to Ketaki. She was just her customer. Yet, humanity prevailed and a thirst for justice apart from the pinch of opium made Ketaki heady for delivering justice to the murder of Moti. By avenging the murder Ketaki's life that had seemed purposeless till now got a meaning.

5. Folk Tales of Odisha

In some of the folk tales of Odisha like Tale of Kanchanbati, Tale of Maunabati, Tale of Paansori and The Tale of Pomegranate Prince, we see recurring themes of polygamy, domestic abuse, and complex man-woman dynamics. In these cases, the women of these stories display unwavering strength and resilience.

(a) Kanchanbati: Kanchanbati is the story of a brother who kills his sister at the requests of his wife, who feels insulted that Kanchanbati has received praises that she cannot cope with for cooking better than she does. This begs the question of the brother's motivations: does he want it out of love for his wife or out of jealousy and intolerance for his sister's success?

(b) Maunabati:

This tale narrates a prince who wants to marry a woman who would survive ten punches. That would be mirroring some sort of cultural approval for domestic violence in early Odisha - maybe an awful acceptance of abuse in marital relationships. The princess Maunabati is smart, wise, and strategic. She agrees to marry the prince but not passively; she challenges him with a condition: if he can make her speak, he can marry her, and in return, he may beat her. It is a very complex arrangement, and her motivation is unclear. One interpretation could be that she wants to provoke the prince to prove his worth and possibly fail, saving her from a forced marriage. Alternatively, it could be a way for her to escape the abuse she might face, using the challenge as a means to regain control over her own fate.

(c) Paansori: In this tale, king, who had neglected the kingdom completely for his infatuation with Paansori, marries another woman named Tarabati. He continues to compare Tarabati with Paansori, which affirms that polygamy was also acceptable in ancient Odia society. Questions arise about love, loyalty, and the relationship between a man and his multiple wives: why did he marry Tarabati if he loved Paansori so much? And why does Paansori welcome him back home after he marries another?

V. CONCLUSION

The role and status of woman characters in Odia literary works discussed in this research paper point to the complex societal norms and power dynamics in ancient times, where polygamy and domestic abuse were not uncommon. These characters give us insights of how women lived in a very complicated web of love, jealousy, and survival fighting patriarchal structures and restrictive gender roles. They raise pertinent questions like whether women had any real choice about accepting such conditions. These stories represent how women, despite the oppressive or difficult circumstances, are smart and strategic in all their planned actions. In some instances, such as Maunabati's case, women seem to be managing situations to their desired end, apparently seeking to escape from potential harm or gaining freedom. The recurring theme across these tales is that though women may face hardship and abuse, they are also serve as resourceful agents who challenge the dynamics imposed on them. In these narratives from Odisha - both stories and folklore, women often display remarkable wit, courage, and agency, challenging discriminating gender stereotypes while straddling through complex situations of love, power, and domestic dynamics.

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Love as a Construct of Power in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*: A Reception-Theoretical Reading

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Abstract— *The Tempest* has been traditionally received as a romance that exalts love, forgiveness, and reconciliation. In fact, love has been traditionally understood as a redemptive moral agent that resolves conflicts and re-establishes harmony. However, this paper will use Reception Theory to show that love in *The Tempest* is a construct of power whose meaning is contingent on the reader's horizon of meaning. Through an analysis of how paternal, romantic, and supernatural love are variously constructed by early modern, Romantic, and modern readers, this paper will show that love is not a stable ethical value but an effective strategy that legitimates power. Through this reception-based analysis, this paper will show that Shakespeare's love is a multifaceted text that can be variously read to naturalize or interrogate power, and that *The Tempest* is a text whose political meaning is constructed through audience interpretation.



Keywords— *Shakespeare, The Tempest, Love, power, Reception Theory, Reader response*

I. INTRODUCTION: LOVE AND THE PROBLEM OF INTERPRETATION

The Tempest (1610-1611) is a special case in Shakespeare's canon as a text that is often interpreted in the context of reconciliation and moral resolution. Love, in critical discourse, is often considered the moral principle that regulates the play's outcome. This assumes a definite moral connotation of love.

Reception Theory, as formulated by Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, contests this premise by suggesting that meaning is a product of the interaction between text and reader. Using this paradigm, this paper will argue that the meaning of love in *The Tempest* can only be constructed within certain horizons of expectations, and that these meanings often consolidate or subvert structures of power.

Instead of interrogating what love signifies in the play, this research inquiry is how love is received and how this reception impacts the perception of authority, obedience, and legitimacy.

II. PROSPERO'S PATERNAL LOVE AND CHANGING RECEPTIONS OF AUTHORITY

The relationship between Prospero and Miranda is presented as paternal love, which is marked by care, protection, and guidance. Prospero's relationship with Miranda would have been received as natural and moral by early modern audiences, who were conditioned by patriarchal norms. Prospero's control over Miranda would have been in accordance with the beliefs of paternal absolutism and filial obedience.

However, Reception Theory shows that this reading is historically mediated. Contemporary readers, influenced by feminist readings and notions of autonomy, tend to see Prospero's paternal love as oppressive and manipulative. His domination of Miranda's knowledge and emotional experience is now commonly seen as ideological indoctrination rather than paternal affection.

Therefore, paternal love becomes a location of interpretive conflict, where power becomes normalized or revealed based on the horizon of expectation of the reader

III. ROMANTIC LOVE AND READERLY IDEALIZATION

The love between Miranda and Ferdinand has always been interpreted as being of a pure, spontaneous, and restorative kind. The innocence of the love between the two characters was emphasized by Romantic and Victorian readers, who saw them as personifications of natural love unaffected by corruption.

However, a reception-based analysis shows that modern readers are more likely to question the terms of this love. The manipulation of their meeting by Prospero and the forced labor of Ferdinand are now seen as signs that romantic love is ideologically constructed.

Reception Theory shows that the liberatory or coercive nature of romantic love in **The Tempest** is not necessarily inherent but is instead revealed in the context of interpretation. As a result, love becomes a symbolic screen that either hides or reveals power.

IV. SUPERNATURAL LOVE AND THE RECEPTION OF OBEDIENCE

The Prospero-Ariel relationship has been regularly described as one of affection and mutual respect. The earlier audience may have perceived Ariel's loyalty as the result of kindness shown to him. In postcolonial and modern interpretations, however, this relationship is interpreted as a model of affective domination, in which love substitutes for force. Ariel's subjection is sustained through affective duty and a deferred freedom. Reception Theory shows that love is a disciplinary affect, whose moral sign is reversed depending on the political awareness of the reader. Love can therefore be either a symbol of unity or a device of control.

V. FORGIVENESS, LOVE, AND THE READER'S ETHICAL JUDGMENT

The final act of forgiveness in **The Tempest** is often read as the ultimate victory of love. However, in the context of Reception Theory, moral interpretation is always dependent on the reader's point of view. Some readers see the forgiveness of Prospero as an act of moral transcendence, while others see it as a moment of asserting his dominance. In this case, love validates Prospero's dominance by making it an act of mercy. Thus, the reception of forgiveness becomes the determining factor in whether love is seen as moral liberation or as political closure.

VI. RECEPTION THEORY AND THE INSTABILITY OF LOVE

Through the application of Reception Theory, it is clear that love in **The Tempest** is not a fixed moral value but a form

of interpretation. Shakespeare's use of love is intentionally open-ended, allowing the reader to engage in the process of interpretation. This is what ensures the play's relevance to each new generation, as each generation redefines love in terms of its ideological agenda. Love becomes a discursive space where power is constantly negotiated.

VII. CONCLUSION

Through the application of Reception Theory, it becomes clear that love in **The Tempest** is a dynamic construct of power, which is as much a product of reader response as it is of textual structure. Shakespeare's play does not offer a unitary ethical reading of love but instead reveals the potential of love to either authorize power or offer a critique of it. Through the application of Reception Theory, **The Tempest** is revealed to be a play that actively involves its readers in the process of political interpretation. Love, which is not merely redemptive, becomes a tool through which power is interpreted.

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Silenced Wounds: Trauma, Justice, and Ethical Representation of Sexual Coercion of Men in *The Bluest Eye* and *The Kite Runner*

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Abstract— Sexual violence is one of the most pervasive and devastating human rights violations, leaving deep psychological, emotional, and social scars on survivors. Rape narratives have long served as powerful tools to expose this violence, challenge societal denial, and give voice to those whose suffering is often hidden behind shame and fear. Rape has historically been shaped by narrow assumptions about gender, frequently portraying women as the sole victims and men solely as perpetrators. By examining rape narratives with particular attention to male victimization, it becomes possible to challenge these deeply rooted stereotypes and broaden our understanding of sexual violence. Male sexual trauma remains one of the most silenced subjects in literary representation due to entrenched norms of masculinity and institutional denial. This paper offers such a comparative analysis of two male victims: Cholly Breedlove in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Hassan in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, examining how trauma, justice, recovery, and ethics are constructed in narratives of male rape. Through a trauma-theoretical and socio-ethical lens, the paper aims to bicker that both novels depict male rape as a socially produced violation rooted in racial and ethnic power structures. While Hassan's trauma manifests as silence and moral endurance throughout the novel, Cholly's trauma emerges as rage, destructive and self-destructive masculinity. The comparison reveals the absence of justice and recognition forecloses recovery and raises urgent ethical questions about witnessing, narrative authority, and responsibility in representing male survivor experiences.



Keywords— trauma studies, rape narratives, male rape, sexual coercion, masculinity, silence, ethics, Morrison, Hosseini

Introduction

Male rape has historically been excluded from dominant literary and legal discourses, rendered unthinkable by cultural constructions of masculinity that equate manhood with invulnerability. When male sexual violation does appear in literature, it is often displaced, silenced, or narratively mediated. Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003) offer two of the most significant English-language representations of male rape, articulated through the characters of Cholly Breedlove and Hassan. Although situated in distinct cultural contexts—racialized America

and ethnically stratified Afghanistan—both novels depict male rape as an act of domination, sexual coercion that produces enduring trauma while being denied justice and voice. Through personal testimonies and literary representations, these narratives confront the realities of trauma while demanding recognition, justice, and empathy. However, a discussion of this limited framework has contributed to the widespread neglect of male rape, rendering male survivors invisible within both social discourse and institutional responses. Cultural expectations of masculinity, stigma, and disbelief often silence men

who experience sexual violence, discouraging them from reporting abuse or sharing their stories.

This paper compares Cholly and Hassan to argue that male sexual trauma in these texts is not an individual pathology but a socially structured wound. By examining trauma, justice, recovery, and narrative ethics, the study demonstrates how both novels expose the cultural mechanisms that silence male survivors and perpetuate cycles of violence. Acknowledging male rape does not diminish the suffering of female survivors; rather, it expands the conversation to include all victims who have been marginalized. Recognizing and analyzing these overlooked narratives is essential for fostering inclusivity, dismantling harmful myths, and creating a more comprehensive and compassionate approach to addressing gender bias, sexual violence and sex education.

Trauma and the Fragmentation of Self

Trauma theory emphasizes that extreme violence resists direct representation and often returns in fragmented or belated forms (Caruth 4). Trauma and fragmentation of the self is obvious in both Hassan and Cholly's experience of sexual violation during adolescence, a formative period that overwhelmingly shapes their identities. In *The Kite Runner*, Hassan's rape by Assef and his friends, is an indirect narration through Amir's perspective, emphasizing the social erasure of the victim's voice. Hassan never names the violation, embodying what Judith Herman identifies as the "unspeakability of trauma" under conditions of shame and powerlessness (Herman 1). Hassan's trauma manifests as silence and submission, an invisible psychological collapse. His continued loyalty to Amir after the assault illustrates how trauma becomes internalized within existing hierarchies of servitude and ethnic oppression. His quiet endurance reflects the Hazara subject's limited access to speech and justice within Pashtun-dominated Afghan society.

Morrison offers a psychologically intimate yet structurally grounded account of Cholly Breedlove's adolescent rape, in contrast. Cholly is forced by white men to perform sexual acts while being watched, an experience Morrison frames as a fusion of sexual humiliation and racial terror. The narrator observes that Cholly feels "a total absence of human dignity," a moment that fractures his emotional capacity for intimacy. Trauma here does not disappear into silence but reemerges as psychic disintegration, aligning with Herman's assertion that unacknowledged trauma often produces rage rather than healing.

Justice and Institutional Failure

Justice is conspicuously absent in both narratives, reinforcing the ethical critique of institutional power. Hassan's rape occurs in a society that neither recognizes

male rape nor values Hazara lives. There is no legal mechanism through which Hassan could seek justice, and Amir's silence further compounds this erasure. Justice in *The Kite Runner* is displaced into moral reckoning, as Amir later seeks personal redemption rather than institutional accountability.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Cholly's rape occurs within a racist legal and social system that protects white perpetrators and criminalizes Black bodies. Morrison situates Cholly's violation within a historical continuum of racial violence, where the law functions as an instrument of domination rather than protection. Saidiya Hartman argues that such scenes reveal how Black suffering is rendered "legible only as spectacle or pathology" (Hartman 21), a condition that forecloses justice entirely.

Both novels thus depict justice as structurally impossible rather than individually denied, revealing the systems of power in point of fact normalize male sexual violence by refusing to name it as such.

Recovery and the Ethics of Non-Redemption

Neither Hassan nor Cholly experiences full recovery, challenging dominant narratives of trauma as something that can be overcome through resilience alone. Hassan's life offers no space for healing; his trauma is absorbed into a life of servitude and ultimately sealed by his death. His moral purity, often idealized by critics, underscores the tragic cost of endurance without recognition.

Cholly's trajectory illustrates a different but equally devastating outcome. Unable to process his trauma, he turns to alcohol and violence, ultimately ending up in a broken, distorted, and toxic relationship with his wife Pauline and raping his daughter, Pecola confusing her and her signs to be Pauline. Morrison's ethical stance is crucial here: the novel contextualizes Cholly's actions without excusing them. Trauma explains but does not absolve. This refusal of redemptive closure aligns with Morrison's broader project of exposing how systemic violence reproduces itself across generations.

Masculinity and the Politics of Silence

Both characters expose the fragility of hegemonic masculinity. Hassan's rape destabilizes ideals of strength and honor, yet his response: loyalty, physical endurance, and silence, functions as a compensatory masculinity within Afghan patriarchal codes. His victimhood must remain invisible to preserve social order.

Cholly's masculinity, by contrast, is violently distorted by racial humiliation. His rape renders him sexually powerless, and his later aggression represents an attempt to reclaim authority through domination. R.W. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity helps illuminate how

both characters are excluded from legitimate manhood, though in culturally specific ways (Connell 77).

Narrative Ethics and Witnessing

Ethically, the novels differ in narrative strategy but converge in purpose. Hassan's trauma is mediated through Amir's guilt, raising questions about narrative authority and secondary witnessing. The reader encounters Hassan's pain indirectly, mirroring his social invisibility. Morrison, however, foregrounds structural causality by embedding Cholly's trauma within historical and racial contexts, refusing voyeuristic detail while demanding ethical engagement.

Both authors position the reader as a witness rather than a consumer of suffering. As Dominick LaCapra argues, ethical trauma narratives resist closure and instead require sustained responsibility from the reader (LaCapra 41).

CONCLUSION

Literature like *The Bluest Eye* and *The Kite Runner* and the comparative analysis of Cholly Breedlove and Hassan demonstrates male sexual victimization has often been silenced, leaving survivors to carry trauma alone, revealing deep emotional impact of these experiences. While Hassan's silence and Cholly's rage represent divergent responses, both reveal the devastating consequences of denied justice and unacknowledged suffering. These novels challenge dominant gender norms, expose the social production of silence, and demand an ethical mode of reading that recognizes male survivors without reducing their trauma to spectacle or moral simplification. Talking about male rape is crucial as it validates survivors, challenges harmful gender norms, and prevents further harm. Today, help lines, counseling, and sex education, right from school and adolescence age exist as a result of demanded recognition from the victims and survivors. Acknowledging their silenced wounds and trauma transform support and suffering into healing.

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The Crisis of Identity in Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*: The Agonizing Awareness that Human-Worth Tangled to Fiscal Expediency

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Abstract— In this paper explores the complicated rapport-building perceptions among the concepts of psychological-alienation, conditional-love, and the sense of ancestral obligation as rendered in Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. Although the changing appearance of Gregor Samsa into a vermin can easily be connected with nervousness over identity-crisis or social-isolation, for this instance, this paper will dedicatedly endeavor to elucidate the underlying tragedy not related with the familial relationships and the sensitive matters as well as psychological dynamics they require. Gregor's transformation is predicated on an overemphasis on the sense of obligation he owes to his family as he continually relinquishes his own wishes in favor of guaranteeing fiscal expediency for his siblings. Then again, he is no longer capable of serving this economic tenacity to his family, as soon as the entire fondness presented to him becomes lucid as to its conditional position of bonding. This insight pursues to elucidate a helpless man Samsa by means of the transformation in *The Metamorphosis* a vermin merely aids to accentuate the long-existing sense of isolation in the protagonist as Kafka's own work epitomizes exactly how societies and familial structures can concentrate people invisible even when they are still human.



Keywords— Alienation, Fiscal Expediency, Identity-Crisis, Sense of Isolation, Vermin.

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the most distinguished works of the 20th century; Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (1915) is usually considered a deep exploration of alienation, mental agony, and the dehumanizing effects of modern society. Whereas it is often understood within the existential and absurdist traditions, the character of Gregor Samsa's metamorphosis into a vermin, a creature is less recognizable as a moment of surrealistic fantasy than as the symbolic realization of the already broken self. In *The Metamorphosis*, Kafka describes a world where human

dignity is reduced, as it were, to the measurement of one's economic and social production, in that way labeling people as objects, rather than as emotional creatures (Kafka 89). *The metamorphosis* of Gregor Samsa ribbons away the fragile supporting to familial and social belonging. Physically, Gregor is imprisoned before and after the transformation. This is just because before the transformation, Gregor lives in a state of psychological imprisonment. This is because he is the only breadwinner for the Samsa family. Because of the overwhelming feeling of responsibility, he is unable to realize his own

desires. Corngold pointed out that Gregor Samsa is defined by his work and that he therefore “remains a function, not a person” in both his own family and in society (Corngold 45). Consequently, Gregor’s condition, in terms of feeling alienated, is the external manifestation of a preceding feeling of self-denial and invisibility.

The reaction of the family to Gregor’s metamorphosis further accents the conditional character of their love. Although at first there is shock and discomfort, soon their empathy evaporates when Gregor loses the ability to provide parsimoniously. As Grete and the parents undertake these newly assigned roles, Gregor comes to be viewed more as an impediment than as a relative, and this demonstrates just how love in the family exists as a condition for use and for economic contributions (Sokel 512). This also symbolically reflects Kafka’s critique on family obligations that lack love and become merely transactional in nature. This paper undertakes to interpret *The Metamorphosis* psychologically to understand the impact of conditional love, family ties, and social alienation on the tragic downfall of Gregor Samsa. Based on various critical perspectives on alienation and dehumanization, the paper contends that the final tragedy in *The Metamorphosis* is not in its physical metamorphosis but in the systematic lack of emotional acknowledgement on the part of both the family and the larger social environment, offered in the narrative by Franz Kafka.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The perilous conventional surrounding of Franz Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis* has long recognized its concern with themes of alienation, dehumanization, and the psychological aftereffects of modern societal organization. The early Kafka scholarship places this work within an existential tradition of anxiety and absurdity and sees Gregor Samsa’s transformation as an analogue of man’s alienation from himself and society. Max Brod, a close associate of Kafka’s, sees Gregor Samsa’s transformation as an expression of spiritual alienation and existential guilt and recognizes in Kafka’s plots men imprisoned within unreadable systems and barred from genuine human relationships (Brod 112). More recent interpretations of the work further develop the existential and identity crisis, nowadays pinpointing the socio-economic aspects of Gregor’s alienation. Indeed, the impact of capitalism on Gregor, turning him into a mere utility, has been widely explored from both the Marxist and sociological perspectives. Walter H. Sokel, to cite one of these interpretations, has claimed that Gregor’s existence is completely defined by his role as a working man, and that his cessation of economic functionality is

the direct cause of his alienation from the familial structure (Sokel 510). Even more insight can be gained from psychological perspectives that view the plight of Gregor in terms of internalized guilt, repression, and self-denial. Stanley Corngold sees the metamorphosis of Gregor as a manifestation of psychological self-denial through external projection as he believes that in reality, Gregor feels like a bug himself as a result of his many years of denial and self-exclusion (Corngold 48).

This indicates that the vermin skin is a reality of his self-acceptance of dehumanization rather than a mere punishment. There has been interest, albeit limited, in family dynamics and the idea of conditional love. The Samsa family’s love has been cited as depending on Gregor’s financial success. In the novel, according to Straus, there is a lack of empathy among family members. This shows the very fragile state of love when it comes under economic duress (Straus 662). This can clearly be seen through the transformation of Grete, the character turning from Gregor’s caregiver to his worst critic. Contemporary scholars incorporate both psychological and sociological approaches to studies on how family obligation is made to be one of the vehicles of emotional violence. Some scholars, like Ritchie Robertson, observe that Kafka portrays the family in his stories in such a manner that it is not a haven but an image of oppressive social institutions, reflecting their structures in order to instill conformity and suppress any kind of vulnerability (Robertson 94). Based on this, Gregor’s family is made to be one that is psychological trauma! By to its members, and they are thus made to feel very isolated. Despite the existence of much work, there remain relatively few studies that synthesize conditional love, alienation, and dehumanization in society within the context of Kafka’s work. In working towards improving past concepts of existential, psychological, and socio-economic interpretations, this article contends that Gregor Samsa’s tragic story is founded in the nexus of family obligation and abandonment. In consolidating its observations within the psychology of love, this report proposes an original work within Kafka studies in its documentation of how love relationships engender the debasing impulse of society, resulting in the destruction of Gregor.

III. METHODOLOGY

The imminent research problem, the present study assumes a qualitative and interpretive research paradigm, wherein the primary sources means of data collection actively involves the close reading of a text namely, Franz Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis*. In extending the above, the current research study which takes the form of a literary

analysis or critical interpretation does not purport to involve the use of empirical information, instead seeking to interpret the narrative, characters, symbolism, and themes inherent in the novel in order to shed light on the psychological and societal implications of Gregor Samsa's tragic fate. In this way, the method of the current research pursues to interpret the salient points in the novel in which the themes of family obligation, emotional alienation, and social isolation intersect, particularly in regard to Gregor's relationship with family members and, in turn, his perceptions regarding the nature of himself (Kafka 21–56).

This up-to-date research as a result assumes an intrinsically interdisciplinary method, conjoining psychological, as well as more generally societal, forms of literary criticism in interpreting the nature of Gregor's transformation in terms going beyond the literal or more fantastic implications thereof. Following two branched stratagem confirms that a well-versed position in terms of the back-and-forth between individual misery and the interchange also exterior aspects of distressful event is attained (Corngold 47; Sokel 509). Primary sources as original text of *The Metamorphosis* along with secondary sources contain published journal articles, English departmental assignment work or critical analyses on the text. It ought to be prominent they will not be observing ancient or factual aspects but will be based on thematic worries for theoretical steadiness between the attitude of conditional-love and alienation as operationally engaged within renovated ancestral connections (Robertson 91).

Discussion on Mental and Societal Perspectives:

The mental state will desire at the perceptions of despotism, guiltiness, and the crisis of identity destruction related additional psychoanalytic reproach. Gregor's prodigious sense of responsibility and self-sacrifice reveals that Freud categorizes as affected individual defeats personal-desires in respect to external prospects. As a result, Gregor's transmutation can be read as a bodily expression of psychosomatic downfall, representing the destruction of selfhood under long emotive suppression. Criticizer for example Stanley Corngold proceeds further footsteps, emotionally, and recommend that Gregor's vermin form conveys an inside self-conception of trans-formal shape over years as well as sensitive negligence and self-denial. This is an apparent impact factor that Samsa has emanated to consent his dilapidation rather than deed in conflict to how far he has adopted the familial unity in accordance with utilitarian outlook. His steady removal from anthropological yearnings and message replicates crisis of identity that heralds his carnal demise.

The story also deals with concepts on isolation and dehumanization enthused by Marxist philosophy. Karl

Marx's idea of isolated-labor is cooperative in considerate Samsa's situation within workstation and domestic matters there he would be valued only for his fiscal expediency. On every occasion Gregor suits incapable to continue effort, frightened socially and ardently, that means that commercial point has infused into bosom affairs. As stated by Sokel, Samsa's kinfolk's reappearance the unequal types of the up-to-date fiscal coordination, constructing a house a place of conditional-love and hospitality. The family at this point obliges as a diminutive form of culture. In accordance with view of Robertson, he stated Kafka boons familial power as part of influential supremacy that controls agreement and rebukes dependency or economic vulnerability (Robertson 93). Grete's alteration from a professional career into the initiator of segregation expressions focuses societal purposes darkens sensitive influences once fiscal expediency fall-down. This means Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* demonstrates how post-modern guys is emotionally engineered to think dehumanization is approximately that is conventional social systems rationalize demonstrative rejection for the sake of responsibility and work.

Gregor Samsa's Crisis of Identity as a Vermin Appearance:

Gregor Samsa's transformation also provides a visible, physical embodiment of a self which is already split in his mind. From the beginning of the novella, Gregor's chief worry is not his transformation but his failure to get to his office, indicating the extent to which the self is linked to employment obligations (Kafka 4). His worry about the availability of the train is a clear indication that his humanity is subordinated to his job. On the word of Corngold, his transformation provides a physical embodiment of his self, which is "already perceived as lessened and expendable" (Corngold 46). Nevertheless, in spite of his monstrous nature, Gregor maintains his humanity in terms of emotions, empathy, and responsibilities, especially towards his family at the end of the story when his uncommunicative nature triggers his speedy Breakdown (catastrophe). Misplacing the ability to speak becomes a metaphor for being ignored by the world, as his thoughts and feelings have terminated to be counted (Kafka 18). With his losing his sense of being a socially recognized being, his humanity itself becomes null and void (social construct implied in Kafka's narrative).

Familial Responsibility and the Aspects of Conditional-Love:

The fact is that the Samsa family relate to Gregor on the basis of financial dependence rather than emotional reciprocity. Before his transformation, Gregor happily

gave up personal freedom in order to repay his father's debts and keep a household, feeling this sacrifice to be a display of familial love (Kafka 27). But this is proven to be fundamentally conditional. The moment Gregor becomes unfit to work; his position in the family radically changes from breadwinner to liability. According to Walter H. Sokel, Gregor's decline provides evidence that the family has internalized their capitalist values of belonging based on usefulness (Sokel 510). The influence of this metamorphosis could be appreciated in the developing acrimony between Samsa's kinfolk-lineage, mainly his daddy's viciousness, represented over and over with events such as apple-throwing, instigating bodily injury to Gregor that incorporate ample refusal by his familial persons (Kafka 63). The apple in Gregor's back gratifies as a long lasting example of apple of discord in his family, which characterizes psychosomatic trauma triggered by Samsa's conditional-love. Grete's alteration in vermin the story functions here as a vital point. Grete initiates with an empathetic attitude but goes through a matter-of-fact or utility-based metamorphosis, lastly proposing that Gregor must be detached. Grete's expression, "we must get rid of it," signifies complete effacement of Gregor's crisis of identity as a brother and human creature (Kafka 75). Straus explains this transformation in Grete's character: "A breakdown in economic structures leads to a destruction of emotional ties, revealing that love is based on conditions rather than being unconditional," as obvious in Gregor's story through Grete's transformation (Straus 664).

Social-Alienation and the Appearance Downfall:

Gregor's isolation is not only originated with his family but it is connected with the fragile fabric social instruments of segregation too. His job as a wandering salesman is a pure example of Marx's insightful model on estranged labor, "in which the activity of doing the job is experienced not as fulfilling but as forced" (Marx 72). Gregor's weariness, less autonomy of decision, letdown to face definite less mental support, all proposes that his life expectancy already want for meaning of nothingness. The transformation only overstates this sensation by interpreting him irresponsible as well as unfit for any profession. The kinfolk's optimal desire to turn their flat into a lodging family for outsiders; additionally it illustrates Gregor's social deportation. The appreciation and accommodation come up with the money for outsiders in the flat that contrast with Gregor's segregation, wallowing, and muzzling (Kafka 68). This converse outcome exemplifies Kafka's interpretation on societal ethics, in which fiscal transaction revenues get superiority over human communication (Kafka 68). Gregory Robertson observes: "Kafka's strategy is, however, to

render Gregor invisible within society, because modern society tends to marginalize all those who refuse to function within productive life" (Robertson 95). Gregor's increasingly strong identification with his vermin metamorphosis, the withdrawal into darkness, lack of appetite, and indifference to neglect that indicates the beginning of the internalization of rejection by society. This eventual death is received with feelings, not of sorrow, but of relief to affirm Gregor's worthlessness and usability only for a specific role in life (Kafka 82). The beginning of freedom experienced by Gregor's family illustrates how Gregor had been dehumanized.

Existential Crisis and the Tragedy of Acceptance:

Whatever purifies Gregor's tragic experience even more tragic is the fact that his resignation is also rooted in psychology. Gregor neither resists nor rebels against being excluded but chooses to submit to his situation and even considers his disappearance an advantage to his family. This attitude, according to Freud, symbolizes the triumph of internalized authority over the individual's desire when the feeling of guilt takes control over self-preservation (Freud 35). Gregor's act of self-annihilation, in this case, cannot be considered a rebellious act but rather an act that erases the self. It can be observed that in Kafka's work, modern man learns to associate his dignity and worth as a self with self-sacrifice as well as self-annihilation in this case to the point that a Gregor Samsa in the story learns to consider sacrificing himself as an advantage to his sister and parents. Gregor's last thoughts in the story reflect more on the welfare of his sister and parents rather than any concern or bitterness, which symbolizes the conditioning that results from the ideals and principles surrounding the psychology and effects of conditional love in Gregor's case (Kafka 81).

IV. CONCLUSION

The Metamorphosis by Franz Kafka is a haunting presentation of human suffering that goes way beyond the grotesque spectacle of physical transformation. This essay has presented the idea that Gregor Samsa's tragedy was not rooted in his vermin body but in the psychological and social terms that shaped his existence: namely, conditional love within the family, oppressive duty, and pervasive alienation. It has shown through a close reading of Gregor's identity, his family relationships, and their social setting, that Kafka unmasks the tragic ends humanity might impose when it bases human worth on usefulness rather than compassion. Gregor's refusal to waver in his sense of family obligation shows how well he has absorbed the expectations both of family and of society at large. His sacrifice for others, presented at first as love,

increasingly serves him as a means of psychological annihilation, rendering him susceptible to abandonment once he ceases to be productive for them. The fact that the family changes from dependency to rejection shows how their love in turn depends for its continuance on Gregor's productivity, thus affirming Kafka's criticism of love transformed into a trade (Kafka 75). The failure to mourn Gregor's death shows how completely he has been denied recognition as a human being.

Through the integration of the psychological and the sociological approaches, the paper has been able to demonstrate how Gregor's acceptance of his degradation depends on internalized feelings of guilt as well as social conditioning. Kafka's statement about the nature of the modern person's responsibility indicates how the modern person, instead of being the simple victim of external forces, is psychologically conditioned to conform to dehumanizing societal structures even in the face of their own destruction (Freud 35; Sokel 512). Gregor's acceptance, therefore, represents the ultimate in alienation. Finally, *The Metamorphosis* urges readers to rethink their concepts of love in family relationships, membership in society, and humanity. The story of transformation by Kafka shows how "the most fundamental kind of metamorphosis takes place in relations, where love is made conditional, duty is destructive, and man loses himself in the machinery of modern civilization." Gregor Samsa's experience is a condemnation of a system of society that allows no compassion and is always a reminder of the psychological pain that comes with conditional humanity.

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Dogri Epic *Jitto*: Through the Lens of Indian and Western Poetics

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Abstract— *The paper explores the dynamic growth of the epic genre as an oral and written tradition. It surpasses different eras, cultures, geographies to replicate the transcending cultures, eras, and geographies to replicate the worldwide condition of the humans and the values of the society. By juxtaposing the Western and Eastern epic traditions- with reference to the classical figures like Homer, Milton, Valmiki and Vyasa- it places the Dogri epic Jitto by Padma shri awardee Jitendra Udampuri in the larger context of the Indian and Western poetics. The Dogra cultural philosophy has been deeply articulated in Jitto, which is grounded in the legend of Bawa Jitto, an agrarian folk hero who forfeited himself in the resistance of feudal oppression. Based upon the Longinus's theory of the sublime, Aristotle's principles of epic structure and tragedy, Longinus's notion of the sublime and Bharata's rasa theory in Natyasastra, the paper examines how the mahakavya synthesizes sublimity, heroism and emotional depth. Heroic (vira) rasa which has been chiefly highlighted in the paper aligns with the main themes of sacrifice and resistance as portrayed in Jitto. The study highlights how Jitto not only disseminates a local legend but also reiterates the epic's everlasting appeal as a genre which is capable of socio-cultural renaissance, historical mindfulness and aesthetic wholeness.*



Keywords— *Epic tradition, Folk literature, Indian Poetics, Jitto, Western Poetics.*

Epic as an oral and written form transcends across ages, generations, cultures and nations, thereby, encompassing a grand philosophy of life. As a creation of the age and essence of its people, epic has moved across space and time to highlight cultural norms and values of any given society during a specific period and beyond. Admittedly, epic poetry with its intense universal relevance has "constantly responded to the profound needs of the society in which it was made" (Abercrombie, 71). The world epic tradition establishes timelessness of epic and exhibits universal human spirit in a diverse socio-cultural background. The connection between history and reality drawn by Andrew Lang when he states that "The epics are not only poetry but history, history not of real events, indeed, but of real manners, of a real world, to us otherwise

unknown." (7) echoes interplay of heroic past to comprehend the evolution of culture and tradition in any society.

As a genre, epic in the West is inextricably linked with Homer and ancient Greek civilization whereas in the East, particularly in India, the genre dates back to 5th Century BCE specifically to Valmiki's *Ramayana*. The western epic tradition ranges from Homer to Milton, and between them the poems of Virgil, Ovid, Lucan, Orlando Furioso, Camoes and Tasso continue the tradition. Likewise, the Indian epic tradition originates with Valmiki, the sage-poet of the *Ramayana* and has been carried forward by Vyasa, Kalidasa, Bharavi, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Sriharsha and others. What is noteworthy is the intersectional dimension of both the western and the

eastern tradition which ostensibly exhibit summation of the values of life by reinforcing nobility and dignity of human effort which has cosmic significance resonated aptly in the words of Eliot, “Every nation, every race has not only its own creative, but its own critical turn of mind” (47).

Irrespective of the fact that the diversity of world cultures has catapulted the expansion of literary canon in various dimensions, epic continues to exist and grow. A cursory glance at the origin of the genre in the West and East through this juxtaposition necessitates further exploration of the genre in the Indian context with special reference to epics written in Indian languages within the intersectional paradigms of Indian poetics and western literary criticism. Taking this as the point of departure, this paper examines the Dogri epic *Jitto* written by Jitendra Udhamपुरi, Padma Shree awardee dogri writer within the theoretical framework of Indian and Western Poetics so as to highlight the overlappings, divergences and “mutually complementary” differences between the two.

To achieve this end, the paper begins by providing a brief overview of the legend of Bawa Jitto which existed as an oral lore, a ballad known as *Karak of Bawa Jitto* which was initially published by Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages. The ballad running into 374 lines is a literary masterpiece and continues to exist in many forms and genres and has been explored, adapted and improvised by writers, scholars and theatre directors. The story of Bawa Jitto goes back to five hundred years when a common man, Jitmal sacrificed his life while fighting against the oppressive practice and unjust demand of a feudal lord. Jitmal's sacrifice immortalized him with the name Bawa Jitto who is as an archetypal Dogra folk hero. An epitome of dogra identity, Jitto still continues to rule the hearts of lakhs of people thronging every year at his Samadhi at Jhiri in Jammu.

The legend has it that Jitmal was a farmer, who lived in a village named Aghaar in the foothills of Trikuta hills, the abode of Goddess Vaishno Devi. An ardent devotee of Goddess and an assiduous farmer, he lived with his adolescent daughter, Kauri since he had lost his wife during child-birth. A doting father, Jitmal had dedicated his life to his daughter's upbringing and lead a spartan life. Jitmal's prosperity, nevertheless, was coveted by his aunt and cousins, who hatched various conspiracies to eliminate him. As a result, Jitmal became a victim of agnatic rivalry in land feuds and left his birth place in resentment when he realized that the judgment of village panchayat was unfair. Jitmal left his home and hearth and came to the plains of Jammu along with his daughter, to seek help of his friend Rullo, who gave him shelter and helped him to approach Mehta Bir, the feudal lord. On Jitmal's insistence to be lent

a piece of land for farming, the landlord granted him a barren unproductive land overgrown with wild growth and also obligated him to pay one fourth of harvest as feudal rent, which was a practice during feudal times.

Jitmal's toil yielded incredible results and the landlord's exploitive tendency took another evil turn when he demanded half the share of the yield. To this, the courageous and upright Jitto disagreed and when the landlord's men came forward to forcibly capture the yield, Jitto demonstrated exemplary courage to end his life over the heap of wheat rather than bowing to the greedy and atrocious wickedness of the feudal lord. He has ever since been venerated as Bawa Jitto and is revered for standing up against the injustice and unfair treatment meted out to peasantry during the feudal times.

The five conditions that Longinus (1965) gives in his essay ‘On the Sublime’ equates sublimity with elevation of the soul so as to evoke great thoughts in the minds of the audience. These five sources of sublime are from the innate inner qualities of a poet. The five main sources of sublimity --- grandeur of thoughts, a vigorous and spirited treatment of the passion, a certain artifice in the employment of figures, dignified expression, majesty and elevation of structure find a strong and convincing illustration in Jitendra Udhamपुरi's mahākāvya *Jitto*. The poet's grandeur of thought is his making the reader delve into rich ethos of *duggar*, which echo Jitmal's persona and actions, thereby, evoking lofty thoughts and stirring emotions. Since noble diction creates dignified expressions, mahākāvya *Jitto* is richly infused with the profound choice of words, metaphors and ornaments of diction, reflected in the very opening of the epic when the poet eulogizes the land of dogras by elevating it to a divine cosmos, where existence of Almighty is omnipresent:

देवी, देवता आंगर लन्दे,

जिस्दे मिट्टी, कंकर, पथर I

डुगार दी ए धरत पवितर,

सुरगे साई तीर्थ घर घर II (*Jitto* 23)

Sacred is soil and stone where

Deity and God are born here

This land of Duggar is angelically pure

Temple of worship is every home where (My trans.)

The western concept of sublimity occupies prominence in the exhilaration of spiritual realization in the epic *Jitto* which resonates with what *rasa* does in Indian poetics. *Rasa* as reader's immersive emotion response to the text exhibits dominant emotion of a literary text. has a cosmic vision. *Rasa* theory, which forms the core of the

whole body of Indian Literary Aesthetics deals with evocation of rasas in a literary work. The concept of rasa was systematically elucidated in one of the seminal texts in Indian Literary Aesthetics, the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, attributed to the sage Bharata Muni. Composed around the 2nd century BCE to the 2nd century CE, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* is a comprehensive treatise on performing arts, encompassing drama, dance, music, and aesthetics. It delineates the principles of *rasa* (aesthetic relish), *bhava* (emotional states), and *abhinaya* (expression) that form the core of Indian aesthetic experience. Understandably, as an age-old concept in the Indian literary universe, the *rasa* as an aesthetic principle has evolved over time with its first mention in *Rigveda* connoting water whereas in *Atharvaveda*, it was elucidated as “juice or sap of grains”. Thereafter, Bharatmuni constructed *Rasa* as the ‘aesthetic pleasure’ which is the aesthetic emotion that a reader or spectator experiences while dealing with a work of art” (Chandran and V.S. 33). Bharata, in the chapter six of *Nāṭyaśāstra* proclaims:

विभावानुभावव्यभिचारिसंयोगाद्रसनिष्पत्तिः । (Bharata, VI.31)

This translates to: The combination of *vibhāvas*, *anubhāvas* and *vyabhicāribhāvas* gives rise to *rasa*.

A *sthāyibhāva* along with *vibhāva*, *anubhāva*, and *vyabhicāribhāva* which are present in a work of art, produces *rasa*. *Vibhāvas* are the stimulants. They perform the task of stimulating a particular emotion in a reader or spectator. The notions of *vibhāva*, *anubhāva*, and *vyabhicāribhāva* have been discussed by Bharata in context of the actor in a dramatic presentation or a work. He enumerates eight *sthāyibhāvas* namely: desire (*rati*), amusement (*hāsa*), grief (*śoka*), anger (*krodha*), determination (*utsāha*), fear (*bhaya*), revulsion (*jugupsā*), and amazement (*vismaya*). He enumerates eight corresponding aesthetic emotions or rasas that come out of the eight *sthāyibhāvas* which are- the erotic (*śṛṅgāra*), comic (*hāsyā*), tragic (*karuṇa*), violent (*raudra*), heroic (*vīra*), fearful (*bhayānaka*), macabre (*bībhatsā*), and wonder (*adbhuta*).

Admittedly, the predominant *rasa* in *Jitto* is heroic (*vīra*), since the epic is rooted in inner enthusiasm (*utsāha*) of the folk hero ignited by his courageous triggers (*vibhāvas*) and presented through his bold action (*anubhāvas*) ostensibly guided by divine authority. Jitmal epitomizes the valiant spirit in Indian aesthetics by his firm determination, valor and insubordination to injustice which are profoundly intertwined with the *vīra rasa*. Jitmal's courage to fulfill the discriminating demands of the feudal lords is an assertion of his self-esteem and dignity that replicates the unwavering spirit of the whole agrarian community. that reflects the spirit of the entire agrarian community. His firm dedication to Goddess Vaishno Devi

also highlights the spiritual aspect of Jitma's character which turned his material fight into a spiritual one. An emotive upsurge is fashioned by the disparity between inner belief and apparent struggle which allows the reader to witness the *vīra rasa* as an intense emotional orientation with justice and courage. Thus, the sacrifice of Jitmal transcends the temporal misery and is steady with the Indian epic tradition which personifies hero as an instrument to maintain the universal balance and moral code of conduct.

Aristotle's statement that epic poetry has a great, a special capacity for enlarging its dimensions, is seen concretized in *Jitto*, where Jitendra Udhamपुरi has effectively comprehended almost all the aspects of life. The writer aims at cosmic majesty of God pervading and transcending our life in beginning when he highlights ubiquitous omnipresence of Goddess in *duggar*:

डुगार देश दा मुकुट त्रिकुटा

जिथे वैष्णो माता बसदी I

ममता दा आपार ओ सागर,

हर मुराद जो पूरी करदी II (Jitto 23)

Trikuta is duggar's crown

Where abides the Goddess our own

Manifestation of maternal love

Fulfills every wish of the one who bows (My trans.)

Jitendra Udhamपुरi follows a sublime heroic ideal of a sound, peaceful and harmonious social order. Spread into 9 Chapters and 1296 slokas, *Jitto*, the hero of the epic is an archetypal dogra farmer who epitomises righteousness, diligence and discipline. The epic portrays Jitto as:

नित- नेमी हा, धर्मी - कर्मी

जप – तप, संध्या – पूजा करदा I

रानहदा – बाहनदा, को कसानी,

कार – बाहार हा इयान्ह चल्दा II (Jitto 24)

Diligent, disciplined and devout

Jitto is a farmer beyond doubt

Ploughing, tilling by the sweat of brow

Draws his sustenance and to the Goddess he bows. (My trans.)

Aristotle's unity of plot and its alliance with tragedy suggests Homer is a paradigm of epic poetry who presents a connected story in the *Iliad* without superfluous narration of the Trojan War. Likewise, dogri mahākāvya *Jitto* focuses on one particular story – the story of a peasant to sustain an organic whole. Based on a legendary figure, the story is set in princely state of Jammu and Kashmir in

fifteenth century when feudal landlordism was oppressive and unjust to the land tillers. The *mimesis* of *Jitto* in verse told in a narrative form draws attention to the life of Jitmal who undergoes numerous hardships despite being an upright and assiduous farmer. The narrative engages us in Jitmal's migration from his native place to an unknown terrain, where he exhibits the power of his hard work by producing plentiful crop produce in a barren land granted by the landlord.

Another significant similarity between epic poetry and tragedy, according to Aristotle is that epic poetry must share many of the elements of tragedy. The six parts of tragedy pervade *Jitto*, wherein the spectacle of Jitmal's native village, Aghaar evokes in the reader a visual image of virgin landscape, swaying pine trees and rippling rivulets and springs. This visual experience is enhanced with diction in canto 5 when Jitmal's daughter, Kauri is lamenting the decision of her father to leave her birth place because it is painful for her leave her house, friends, fields, plants, trees and childhood memories. The following lines from the epic are a poignant description of a little girl's emotional bond with her motherland besides giving a vivid visual picture of the flora and fauna:

इंदे मिठे फल मैं खाडे

ले इंदे ने झूटे

किश ते आप- मूहारे ते किश

बापू लाये बूटे (*Jitto* 116)

Those juicy fruits I savoured

And I grew swaying these swings

some ever greens I know are perennial

And father has planted and nurtured others.

(My trans.)

ए ऊचा सिंबल दा बूटा

ओ दा पछवार

कियाँ करिये छोरण बापू

इन्दा गुजजा प्यार (*Jitto* 116)

Oh! this red silk cotton tree

in my backyard so imposing and tall

Listen father! How can I ever be free

From its warmth, care and call. (My trans.)

Such poignant spectacle, diction and melody is further augmented with the feature *anagnorisis*, which Aristotle defines as "a change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune". One of the most remarkable traits of Mahākāvya *Jitto* is hero's sudden awareness of a

real situation and a critical discovery which occurs twice - once in the beginning when he becomes aware of the futility of living in Aghaar, where his aunt and cousins spare no chance to harm him and stooped to the level of intimidating and attacking his daughter. Finally, Jitmal is transformed from an ignorant to an enlightened hero towards the end when he refuses to accept cruelty and unjust demand of the feudal lord, Mehta Bir Singh. Anagnorisis as the hero's sudden awareness of a real situation and his insight into a relationship with an often antagonistic character is explicit in the below quoted lines when Jitmal emerges as a peasant hero by subverting Mehta Bir Singh's arbitrary commands, avarice and injustice. Therefore, he jumps over the heap of grain and thrusts a dagger in his chest. His last words are poignantly drawn by the poet which also resonate the critical discovery of the protagonist

मेरा लहू ते सूहा मेहतया

तेरी रत्त ए चिट्टी I

दिना तुकी रत रलाइ

खायान कनक नी रुखी II (*Jitto* 208)

My blood is red, oh Mehta!

whereas yours is white

here I colour them these grains

Don't you eat them white. (My trans.)

Ostensibly, Jitmal subverted the power dynamics in fifteenth century feudal society through his sacrifice. As an aftermath of the sacrifice of such a noble soul, the wrongdoers were punished by nature through disease and cataclysmic devastation. Jitmal's daughter Kauri could not bear her separation from father and committed sati with her father. Jitmal's friend Rullo and his wife, Jiyuni, who had been with them throughout their struggle erected a temple in their memory and their sacrifice apotheosized them Jitmal and kauri. Shiv Nirmohi, an eminent writer and historian, in his paper entitled, "Duggar Da Shaheed Devta: Bawa Jitto" calls Jitto, "A Shaheed Devta." According to him, deification of a martyr has been a tradition in *duggar* and a person sacrificing his life for his rights is deified and is called a martyr deity in *duggar*.

On the literary canvas of dogri literature, there exists rich corpus of the Jitto legend – be it epic, play, short story or children book. The English translation of the dogri play, *Bawa Jitto* by Vandana Sharma was published in the year 2011 wherein the Foreword to *Bawa Jitto*, G K Das has made pertinent observation about the sacrifice of Jitto when he writes, "There is something intriguingly atavistic about Bawa's action for which there can be no simple explanation in terms of behavioral psychology or cultural anthropology". Das further states that Jitto's action has the

power to regenerate the society similar to the “practices of animal/human sacrifice for regeneration of life and crop” and also like “James Frazers’ accounts of older community life and of fertility gods who were consigned to death for new and better yield.” (viii)

Dogri mahākāvya *Jitto* parallels the universal appeal of other two great epics – Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and Valmiki’s *Ramayana* in treating eternal problem of good and evil in the life on earth. It is noteworthy that the three epics from different times and contexts, “assert eternal providence, and justify the ways of God to men resonated in the words of Milton. Further, what makes *Jitto* timeless is its contemporary appeal aptly averred by Sharma, Sood when they write that, “An epitome of Dogra identity, *Jitto* still continues to rule the hearts of lakhs of people thronging every year at his Samadhi at Jhiri in Jammu”. (5)

GLOSSARY

Duggar: A word for the land of Dogras. Dogras are inhabitants of Jammu province, southern regions of Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and some parts of Pakistan like Sialkot. Before Partition 22 ranges of Dogras existed, which were ruled by Dogra rulers. Duggar has its own culture, folklore and language. The political divisions after Partition brought immense demarcations in the land of dogras. Jammu is now predominantly called the land of Dogras.

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George Orwell: A Novelist with a Political Perspective on Society

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Abstract— George Orwell is considered the preeminent satirist of the 20th century. Unlike Jonathan Swift, Orwell employs a humor devoid of invective or burlesque elements. He maintains an excellent balance between sarcasm and comedy. His sarcasm demonstrates that he was a revolutionary intent on eradicating societal shortcomings. He targeted the root causes of the societal and political issues. He was tormented by the societal class disparity, subjugation, and destitution. While his writings are distinguished by an autobiographical element, his satirical style remains entirely impartial and analytical. Similar to other satirists, he did not want to adopt a propagandistic approach. He vehemently fought the totalitarian regimes of Stalinist Russia and fascism in Spain. He believed that politics has a crucial role in transforming societal norms. While many theorists have proposed diverse ideologies, only a few have significantly advanced societal development.



Keywords— Political, Progress, Satire, Society

George Orwell is a preeminent novelist of the modern age. His writings convey a potent criticism of political and societal hypocrisies. He distinguishes himself as a compelling social critic of contemporary society. Like G. B. Shaw, Orwell used to elucidate societal flaws, ensuring that the comedic elements never obscured the gravity of his communication. George Orwell was totally engaged with the political challenges of his time. The aim of his work was to illuminate political motives through the potent medium of fiction. *Animal Farm* is an incisive parody of totalitarianism and fascism. It illustrates the absurdities and shortcomings of human political conduct and institutions. Using the medium of animal fable, Orwell explores how societal structures often degenerate into fascism and totalitarianism, despite their socialist origins.

Like Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, *Animal Farm* utilizes wit and satire to expose societal foibles, offering a biting critique of 20th-century political corruption. It perpetuates the sarcastic methodology of Dryden, whereas Pope and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* is particularly distinguished for its satirical component. Orwell seems to

be inspired by Swift. *Animal Farm* is one of the most potent political satires in English literature. The essence of the satire was, "In each great revolutionary struggle, the masses are led on by vague dreams of human brotherhood, and then, when the new ruling class is well established in power, they are thrust back into servitude. This is practically the whole of political history, as Burnham sees it" (Orwell 161). In the history of English literature, Orwell is one of the greatest political satirists like Swift or Goldsmith. A deep study of his novels shows that his literary qualities are expressed through political satire. *Animal Farm* is the most potent political satire written by Orwell. He authored this narrative, *Animal*, to illustrate the malevolence of Soviet governmental practices. Similarly, *Nineteen Eighty Four* is a satire on modern society. In this book, he describes the proletariat as a collective body, kept in a state of ignorance. He envisioned that the members of political parties would transform into unthinking automatons, equipped with a button-activated intellect. The societal emotional landscape would be irrevocably devastated. This work is an excellent parody of contemporary culture.

Satire is a criticism of society. A satire is the best critic of society. George Orwell's most impactful satire, *Animal Farm*, exemplifies his ability to weave wit and sharp political commentary into a narrative that rivals the works of Jonathan Swift. He used the fairy tale genre to highlight the deficiencies in Stalin's programs. Similar to John Dryden, who portrays animals engaging in political discourse, George Orwell critiques the whole political system dominated by dictatorial and tyrannical powers.

As a patriot, he cherished his nation along with its rituals and traditions, however he did not hesitate to denounce those practices and traditions that caused the suffering of the populace. His deep involvement in contemporary politics produced a narrative style that fuses revolutionary idealism with a grim, pragmatic realism. Similar to other literary personalities, he also contended that materialism impeded the attainment of tranquility. Consequently, he emphasized the spiritual impulses. His works are the most incisive critique of the social and political issues of his time. These works underscore the principal issues of the contemporary period.

Orwell saw that financial resources are the pressing need of the average individual. He saw that the affluent were few in number, whilst the impoverished were many. Consequently, if the financial issues faced by the average individual are not adequately addressed, he may fall prey to exploitation by the affluent. Economic injustice is a significant factor contributing to the suffering of ordinary people. The central theme of the novel *A Clergyman's Daughter* deals with the injustice and inequality in human society. The Clergyman is harassed by tradesman's debts. When Dorothy, the protagonist, finds herself penniless in London, she loses her memory.

The protagonist of Orwell's third novel, *Keep the Aspidochelone Flying*, Gordon Comstock, is a young man with literary inclinations. Because of his literary interests he gives up an opportunity in an advertising company and takes up a job as a book shop assistant at two pounds a week. He adopts this routine to afford himself sufficient time for his literary pursuits. Despite getting the job at the bookshop, his mind remains clouded by the constant struggle of poverty. He asserts that financial deprivation engenders several hardships in human existence. He becomes enamored with a girl named Rosemary, who rejects his marriage proposal due to his financial destitution. Subsequently, she consents to marry him.

In *Coming Up for Air*, George Orwell Bowling perceives himself as engaged in a conflict with money. He classifies society into only two classes: the rich and the poor. Consequently, he concludes that the poor are inevitably exploited by the rich. He is bound to conclude

that the poor are exploited at the hands of the rich. He believes that the distinction between the rich and the poor vanishes when one regards the nation from the outside. Orwell's fifth novel, *Animal Farm*, which garnered significant acclaim, fundamentally addresses the exploitation of the impoverished by the affluent. Once Napoleon consolidates power and accumulates wealth, he systematically reduces the rations of the other animals to further increase his riches. Orwell's last work, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, presents the author's perspective on the plight of the impoverished. Winston Smith, the protagonist of the novel, works for the Ministry of Truth and maintains a private diary to record his innermost thoughts regarding social injustice.

As a keen observer of society, the novelist conveys a message of democratic values. He believes that socialism is the solution to several societal ills. The issue of inequality and injustice is addressed by socialism. He believed that all the systems were useless and full of hopelessness. He thought that socialism should be separated from utopianism, because the people who confused socialism and utopianism. He said that socialism is grounded in reality, but utopianism is rooted in fantasy. Utopians may assert the possibility of creating a flawless society, while a socialist would refrain from making such a claim. He wishes to eliminate such items. He would like to remove the gap between the rich and the poor. He seeks to prove that this gap causes much suffering to the poor.

Orwell was an anti-communist who opposed totalitarianism—a system where society is ruled by a dictator or a small group. All human liberties and rights are stripped away. Fascism, communism, and extreme socialism exemplify totalitarianism. Consequently, the totalitarian state is not accountable for justice to society. Orwell despised the society governed by authoritarianism. He asserts that totalitarian-minded scientists and political figures are systematically undermining the tranquility of the past and the related socio-ethical principles. Science has irrevocably transformed the landscape of human civilization. Orwell was concerned with the malignancies of imperialism, destitution, and social inequity. His most acclaimed work, *Animal Farm*, illustrates the malevolence of totalitarianism, as he saw the contemporary world transitioning towards an era of dictatorial tyranny. Knowledge is a potent tool as it enables individuals to develop their own beliefs and see topics from many viewpoints; nevertheless, in the absence of education, one is susceptible to manipulation. *Animal Farm* presents many instances when the uninformed animals were readily used by Napoleon, Squealer, or the humans. An instance occurred when Benjamin, the donkey attempted to persuade

the horses driving the knacker's truck, which had Boxer, to halt, and he exclaimed:

"Comrades, comrades! they shouted. "Don't take your own brother to his death!" But the stupid brutes, too ignorant to realise what was happening, merely set back their ears and quickened their pace. Boxer's face did not reappear at the window. Too late, someone thought of racing ahead and shutting the five-barred gate; but in another moment the van was through it and rapidly disappearing down the road. Boxer was never seen again" (Orwell 123).

The horses have likely been brainwashed to see their actions as having a noble goal, despite their ignorance of the specifics; also, the horses, like the majority of the animals on *Animal Farm*, are illiterate and readily manipulated by their 'leaders'. The horses do not seem to comprehend why the other animals are frantic; however, they appear indifferent because they lack personal opinions. Since their sole purpose is to please their owner, they blindly follow orders without question.

The political and historical context has been analyzed to validate the relationship between the story and reality throughout the novel's composition. Orwell has anthropomorphized the animals in the allegorical tradition to symbolize actual historical individuals. *Animal Farm* is a significant satire in which Orwell used irony to subvert the principles of dictatorship, particularly Stalinism. Although he agreed with several Marxist principles, Orwell rejected the communist interpretation of socialism, since he detected significant parallels between the communist regime and the czarist rule of historical Russia. Orwell views communism as inherently hypocritical. When the elite class has significant resources such as power, wealth, economic influence, and propaganda in comparison to the general populace, they often utilise these assets to achieve dominion and oppress the lower classes. Orwell has elucidated the connection between authoritarianism and dystopian society. In *Animal Farm*, Orwell illustrates how corrupt leaders with absolute power believe they are immune to accountability. Through this allegorical narrative, he depicts a realistic portrayal of human behaviour towards others upon assuming power. Orwell concludes that revolutionaries who reject oppression and corruption often transform into megalomaniac rulers and ruthless dictators once they possess absolute power. This novel illustrates the formation of Joseph Stalin's totalitarian rule and the ascent and collapse of socialism in the Soviet Union. Orwell's critique of authoritarianism and communism extends beyond Stalin; it may be seen as a global admonition. It constitutes a comprehensive criticism of totalitarianism in Nazi Germany under Hitler, fascist Italy under Mussolini, Spain under

Franco, China under Mao, and capitalism in America, England, and the Soviet Union.

However, Orwell maintains an optimistic perspective towards societal advancement. He believed that intellectuals could defend moral values and consciousness of the common people from the invasion of totalitarianism. Therefore intellectuals should realize their role in this connection. However, the novels of Orwell are the best warning against the dangers and evils of totalitarian activities. *Animal Farm* is a subject of reading and analysis due to its enduring themes and pertinence to contemporary issues. It has been transformed into films, theatrical productions, and many other media, and it persistently motivates new generations of readers to engage in critical analysis of politics and power.

Animal Farm is an exceptional political satire that has endured through the ages. It has been adapted into films, plays, and other media, and it continues to inspire new generations of readers to think critically about politics and power. By using animals as symbols for humanity and utilising satire and parody, George Orwell has crafted a significant political and social commentary that will remain relevant and inspirational for years ahead.

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Motherhood, Migration, and Feminist Ethics: A Transnational Feminist Reading of Shilpi Somaya Gowda's *Secret Daughter*

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Abstract— This paper examines Shilpi Somaya Gowda's *Secret Daughter* (2010) through the lens of transnational feminism, arguing that the novel interrogates gendered oppression, motherhood, and reproductive choice within intersecting frameworks of nation, class, race, and global inequality. Moving beyond liberal feminist narratives of individual choice and empowerment, Gowda's text foregrounds the uneven power relations that structure women's lives across borders. Through the parallel narratives of Kavita, an Indian woman forced to relinquish her daughter due to patriarchal violence, and Somer, an Indian-American adoptive mother navigating infertility and transnational adoption, the novel exposes the ethical complexities of global motherhood. Drawing on transnational feminist theorists such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Inderpal Grewal, and Nira Yuval-Davis, this study argues that *Secret Daughter* critiques both Indian patriarchy and Western neoliberal feminism, revealing how women's reproductive lives are shaped by global capitalism, migration, and nationalist ideologies. The novel ultimately articulates a transnational feminist ethics grounded in care, responsibility, and contextual solidarity rather than universalist notions of women's liberation.



Keywords— Transnational feminism, motherhood, adoption, diaspora, reproductive politics, globalization, feminist ethics

Introduction

Contemporary feminist literary criticism increasingly turns to transnational frameworks to analyze narratives shaped by globalization, migration, and uneven power relations. Traditional feminist approaches, particularly those rooted in Western liberal ideology, have often framed women's emancipation in terms of individual choice, autonomy, and empowerment. However, such frameworks frequently overlook how women's lives are constrained by structural forces such as patriarchy, nationalism, capitalism, and colonial history. Transnational feminism emerged as a response to these limitations, insisting that gendered experience must be understood within specific historical and geopolitical contexts (Mohanty).

Shilpi Somaya Gowda's *Secret Daughter* offers a rich site for transnational feminist analysis. The novel traces the intertwined lives of two women across India and North America: Kavita, a poor Indian woman who is forced to abandon her daughter to save her from infanticide, and Somer, an Indian-American woman who adopts the child after struggling with infertility. Through this dual narrative, Gowda exposes the gendered violence embedded in Indian patriarchal culture while simultaneously critiquing Western assumptions about rescue, choice, and maternal fulfilment.

This paper argues that *Secret Daughter* embodies transnational feminist consciousness by foregrounding how women's reproductive lives are shaped by intersecting forces of class, nation, and global inequality. Rather than presenting adoption as a simple narrative of salvation, the

novel reveals the ethical tensions inherent in transnational motherhood, challenging universalist feminist narratives and emphasizing responsibility, care, and relational ethics.

Transnational Feminism: A Theoretical Framework

Transnational feminism emerged in the late twentieth century as a critique of Western feminist universalism and neoliberal global feminism. Chandra Talpade Mohanty's foundational work argues that Western feminist discourse often constructs "Third World women" as a homogeneous, oppressed group, thereby erasing differences of class, culture, and agency while reinforcing colonial hierarchies (Mohanty 19). Such representations position Western women as liberated subjects and non-Western women as victims, in need of rescue.

Transnational feminism rejects this binary by emphasizing historical specificity, intersectionality, and power relations across borders. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan argue that feminist analysis must attend to transnational flows of capital, labor, and culture that shape women's lives unevenly (Grewal and Kaplan 14). Rather than assuming a global sisterhood, transnational feminism calls for context-specific solidarities grounded in accountability and difference.

A crucial aspect of transnational feminism is its interrogation of reproductive politics. Women's reproductive labor—childbearing, caregiving, adoption—is deeply implicated in nationalist and capitalist structures. Nira Yuval-Davis notes that women often function as biological and cultural reproducers of the nation, making their bodies sites of ideological control (Yuval-Davis 22). Transnational feminist theory thus provides a critical framework for analyzing motherhood not as a private experience but as a politically regulated practice.

Patriarchy, Poverty, and Gendered Violence in India

In *Secret Daughter*, Kavita's narrative exposes the brutal realities of gendered oppression within Indian patriarchal society. Forced by her husband and mother-in-law to abandon her newborn daughter to avoid infanticide, Kavita's experience highlights how female lives are devalued within rigid patriarchal and economic structures (Gowda). Her lack of choice is not the result of personal failure but of systemic violence shaped by poverty, dowry culture, and son preference.

From a transnational feminist perspective, Kavita's story challenges Western feminist narratives that frame choice as universally available. Mohanty argues that feminist politics must distinguish between "choice" and "conditions of choice," recognizing that agency operates within structural constraints (Mohanty 141). Kavita's decision to give up her daughter is an act of survival rather

than empowerment, underscoring the limits of liberal feminist frameworks. The novel thus situates gendered violence within broader socio-economic contexts, revealing how patriarchy intersects with class and nation to regulate women's reproductive lives.

Transnational Adoption and Neoliberal Feminism

Somer's narrative, set primarily in the United States and Canada, offers a contrasting yet interconnected perspective on motherhood. As an Indian-American woman struggling with infertility, Somer initially views adoption as a solution to personal loss. Her journey reflects neoliberal feminist ideals that prioritize individual fulfillment and choice. However, Gowda complicates this narrative by exposing the ethical implications of transnational adoption.

Transnational feminism critiques adoption practices that replicate global inequalities, where children from the Global South are transferred to affluent Western families. Grewal notes that such practices are often framed as humanitarian acts while obscuring the structural conditions—poverty, patriarchy, lack of social support—that produce adoptable children (Grewal 52). *Secret Daughter* resists this simplification by maintaining Kavita's presence in the narrative, refusing to erase the birth mother. Through Somer's growing awareness of Kavita's pain, the novel destabilizes rescue narratives and emphasizes relational responsibility rather than ownership.

Motherhood as Transnational Feminist Ethics

In *Secret Daughter*, motherhood is not represented as a natural, instinctive, or universally fulfilling role; rather, it is portrayed as an ethically charged, politically regulated, and emotionally fragmented experience shaped by patriarchy, class inequality, and transnational power relations. Gowda's novel challenges dominant representations of motherhood that privilege biological ties or idealize maternal sacrifice by situating maternal experience within global systems of gendered oppression. Through the parallel narratives of Kavita and Somer, *Secret Daughter* constructs motherhood as a transnational feminist ethical practice grounded in care, responsibility, and relational accountability rather than ownership or fulfillment.

Transnational feminist theory has long emphasized that motherhood is a critical site where gender, nation, and power intersect. Nira Yuval-Davis argues that women are positioned as biological and cultural reproducers of the nation, making their reproductive capacities subject to intense social regulation (Yuval-Davis 22). Kavita's experience exemplifies this dynamic. Her pregnancy and childbirth are controlled by her husband and in-laws, who view the female child as an economic burden rather than a human life. Kavita's forced relinquishment of her daughter

is thus not a maternal choice but a survival strategy enacted under patriarchal coercion. From a transnational feminist perspective, her motherhood exposes the violence embedded in systems that devalue female lives while exploiting women's reproductive labour.

By contrast, Somer's experience of motherhood is shaped by diaspora, infertility, and global privilege. As an Indian-American woman living in North America, Somer initially understands motherhood through a liberal feminist framework that emphasizes desire, choice, and personal fulfillment. Adoption appears as a solution to infertility, framed within legal and humanitarian discourse. However, Gowda gradually complicates this perspective by revealing the unequal global conditions that make transnational adoption possible. Inderpal Grewal critiques such neoliberal frameworks for obscuring structural inequalities by presenting reproductive solutions as individual consumer choices (Grewal 52). Somer's evolving consciousness reflects this critique as she begins to recognize that her maternal fulfillment is linked to another woman's loss.

Importantly, *Secret Daughter* refuses to construct a hierarchy between Kavita and Somer, resisting narratives that portray the Western adoptive mother as savior and the birth mother as disposable. Instead, Gowda maintains both maternal presences within the narrative, highlighting what transnational feminism identifies as relational ethics. Chandra Talpade Mohanty emphasizes that feminist solidarity must be rooted in mutuality and accountability rather than abstract sisterhood (Mohanty 243). Motherhood in the novel becomes an ethical relation that acknowledges unequal power while resisting erasure.

Motherhood in *Secret Daughter* is also deeply affective, characterized by grief, longing, and ambivalence rather than joy or completion. This emotional complexity challenges dominant cultural ideals that equate motherhood with fulfillment. Transnational feminist scholars argue that such idealization often masks women's suffering and silences maternal ambivalence (Tong 117). Kavita's enduring grief and Somer's persistent sense of incompleteness reveal motherhood as an ongoing emotional labor shaped by structural constraints rather than a resolved identity.

Moreover, the novel situates motherhood within global circuits of care, where children, emotions, and responsibilities cross national borders. Adoption does not sever maternal bonds but reconfigures them across space and time. This transnational reconfiguration aligns with feminist ethics that prioritize care over possession. Rather than asserting exclusive maternal rights, the novel proposes a model of shared ethical responsibility—one that

recognizes multiple maternal claims without collapsing them into competition.

Through this framework, *Secret Daughter* advances a transnational feminist understanding of motherhood as an ethical practice that demands attentiveness to inequality, power, and loss. Motherhood becomes a site of feminist resistance not through empowerment or liberation but through sustained care under conditions of injustice. Gowda thus reframes maternal love as politically significant, revealing how intimate emotions are shaped by global systems of oppression and connection.

Ultimately, *Secret Daughter* demonstrates that motherhood cannot be understood outside the structures that govern women's bodies and reproductive labour. By foregrounding maternal experience as transnational, relational, and ethically complex, the novel contributes to feminist debates that seek to move beyond biological essentialism and neoliberal individualism. Motherhood, in this text, emerges as a feminist ethics of responsibility—one that demands recognition of unequal power relations while affirming the enduring human capacity for care across borders.

Silence, Voice, and Feminist Solidarity

Silence in *Secret Daughter* operates not merely as the absence of speech but as a complex gendered and transnational condition shaped by power, fear, and survival. Kavita's silence is imposed by patriarchal authority—her husband, mother-in-law, and socio-economic dependency leave her with no legitimate space for resistance. Her inability to speak openly about her grief reflects what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak identifies as the condition of the subaltern woman, whose voice is systematically excluded from dominant discourse (Spivak 287). Kavita's silence, therefore, is not passive but symptomatic of structural oppression rooted in gender, class, and nation.

At the same time, Somer's silence functions differently. As a diasporic Indian woman in North America, Somer experiences emotional silence born from cultural dislocation, infertility, and unspoken expectations of motherhood. Her reluctance to articulate her pain reveals how even privileged women are constrained by normative ideals of femininity and success. Transnational feminism recognizes that silence can be both a strategy of survival and a sign of emotional labour, especially for women navigating multiple cultural worlds (Mohanty 142).

The novel's narrative structure itself becomes an act of feminist solidarity by holding both silences together without collapsing them into equivalence. Gowda does not allow Somer's voice to overwrite Kavita's suffering, nor does she romanticize Kavita as a symbol of pure

victimhood. Instead, the text creates what Mohanty terms a “feminist solidarity based on difference and accountability” rather than sameness (Mohanty 243). Solidarity in *Secret Daughter* emerges through ethical recognition—acknowledging unequal power relations while refusing erasure.

Critique of Universalist Feminism

One of the most significant contributions of *Secret Daughter* to feminist discourse lies in its critique of universalist and liberal feminist paradigms. Liberal feminism often conceptualizes women's liberation in terms of individual autonomy, choice, and self-realization. However, Gowda's novel exposes the limitations of such frameworks by demonstrating how “choice” is unevenly distributed across socio-economic and geopolitical contexts.

Kavita's decision to relinquish her daughter is frequently misread through a liberal feminist lens as maternal sacrifice or tragic necessity. A transnational feminist reading, however, reframes this act as one produced by structural coercion, not free will. Mohanty emphasizes that feminist theory must distinguish between “having choices” and “having the power to choose” (Mohanty 141). Kavita's lack of access to education, financial independence, and social protection renders liberal feminist notions of agency inadequate.

Similarly, Somer's initial understanding of adoption reflects Western feminist assumptions that motherhood can be fulfilled through individual desire and legal processes. Gowda gradually destabilizes this perspective by foregrounding the unequal global conditions that make transnational adoption possible. As Grewal argues, neoliberal feminism often masks global inequality by framing transnational practices as personal solutions rather than political problems (Grewal 52).

Through these parallel critiques, *Secret Daughter* resists feminist universalism and instead advances a contextual, relational feminism attentive to power, privilege, and responsibility across borders.

CONCLUSION

Secret Daughter offers a nuanced and ethically complex articulation of transnational feminist consciousness by centering motherhood, migration, and reproductive politics within global systems of inequality. Through the intertwined narratives of Kavita and Somer, Gowda demonstrates that women's lives cannot be understood through singular feminist frameworks detached from history, class, and nation. The novel insists that feminist analysis must move beyond empowerment

narratives to confront structural violence and unequal access to agency.

By refusing to privilege one maternal experience over the other, the text redefines motherhood as a relational and transnational practice, grounded in care, responsibility, and emotional labour rather than biological or legal ownership. This reconfiguration aligns with Yuval-Davis's argument that women's reproductive roles are deeply entangled with nationalist and global power structures (Yuval-Davis 29).

Ultimately, *Secret Daughter* contributes significantly to transnational feminist literature by offering a model of feminist solidarity rooted in ethical witnessing rather than rescue, recognition rather than appropriation, and accountability rather than abstraction. The novel challenges readers to reconsider feminist politics in a globalized world, emphasizing that meaningful solidarity emerges not from shared identity but from sustained engagement with difference and inequality. In this way, *Secret Daughter* stands as a powerful critique of both patriarchal oppression and neoliberal feminist ideology, affirming transnational feminism as an essential critical framework for contemporary literary studies.

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Investigating the Challenges Faced by the Learners of English as a Second Language: Mixed-Method Design

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Abstract— Grammatical competence, or the capacity to comprehend and construct grammatically sound sentences, is the foundation of successful communication in every language. This study explored the challenges faced by Grade 11 STEM students at the University of Cebu Pardo and Talisay, Inc. in achieving grammar competence during the academic year 2024-2025. The research employed a mixed-method research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the students' linguistic weak points and lived experiences. The quantitative findings revealed varied levels of grammar proficiency among the 41 student respondents. While students demonstrated "Outstanding" mastery in determiners, their performance in subject-verb agreement, pronoun identification, and relative clauses "Did Not Meet Expectations". Notably, a critical gap was identified in prepositions, where students recorded a 0% correct average. For data analysis, the study utilized statistical treatment for quantitative data to determine frequencies, percentages, and the significant relationship between student profiles and grammar competence. For the qualitative phase, the Colaizzi method was used to analyze in-depth interviews, allowing the researcher to identify significant statements and formulate meanings that eventually clustered into the emergent themes. The main themes emerging from the qualitative analysis were: (1) Multifaceted Nature of English Grammar Acquisition, (2) How Experience and Deep Involvement Shape Us, (3) The Influence of the First Language (L1), and (4) Impact of Explicit Instruction and Learning Strategies. The qualitative results highlighted that students perceived grammar acquisition as a holistic challenge shaped by a complex interplay of internal and external elements. These themes underscored that L1 interference (specifically Bisaya) and the lack of exposure were primary hurdles, while interactive strategies such as games and real-world applications were seen as highly effective for retention. Based on these findings, a set of differentiated learning activities was proposed to enhance student performance. In conclusion, the study reveals that while students demonstrate mastery in certain fundamental areas, significant gaps in grammatical competence persist due to the complex interplay of first-language interference and a lack of immersion; consequently, it is recommended that educators adopt the proposed differentiated learning activities and interactive, strategy-based instruction to address these multifaceted linguistic challenges and foster a more holistic mastery of the English language.



Keywords— *Challenges of ESL Students, Differentiated Learning, Grammatical Competence, Colaizzi Method, Mixed Methods, Cebu City, Philippines.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Grammatical competence, or the capacity to comprehend and construct grammatically sound sentences, is the foundation of successful communication in every language. However, learners must overcome many obstacles to become proficient in grammar in a second language (L2). This study explores these issues to help teachers and curriculum creators improve L2 grammar education.

English has become a dominant language of instruction globally, yet its acquisition poses significant challenges for non-native speakers. These learners often face obstacles stemming from their learning environments, cultural differences, and, crucially, the influence of their native languages. This "mother tongue interference" can hinder the acquisition of English grammar, vocabulary, and syntax, as learners may unconsciously apply L1 rules and structures to the new language. Consequently, reliance on L1 knowledge can lead to comprehension difficulties and impede overall English proficiency. Therefore, understanding and addressing L1 interference is crucial for effective English language instruction for non-native speakers, as mentioned by Soomro (2022).

Diaubalick and Guijarro (2019) explained the significant impact of a learner's first language (L1) on second language (L2) acquisition, particularly in the domain of grammar, such as tense and aspect. Learners with L1s similar to the target L2, like Romance language speakers learning Spanish, benefit from existing linguistic overlap, facilitating easier acquisition. Conversely, learners with dissimilar L1s, such as German speakers learning Spanish, often transfer L1-based strategies, which can hinder the complete acquisition of certain L2 features. In this case, German speakers' reliance on adverbs to express aspect, a strategy from their L1, interferes with their ability to fully acquire Spanish verbal morphology for aspect. This L1 influence persists even with external factors like immersion, demonstrating the robust and enduring impact of prior linguistic knowledge on L2 learning.

Notable significant challenges to second language acquisition, specifically indicating that learners' lack of motivation and anxiety surrounding speaking impede their progress, as stated by Nkhi (2023). The observed scarcity of interactive classroom activities further exacerbates this issue by limiting language exposure and opportunities for practice. This lack of exposure directly contributes to communicative incompetence, hindering learners' ability to

use the language in real-world contexts effectively. Therefore, increasing interactive activities is crucial for providing necessary language exposure and fostering a more engaging learning environment. Balancing fluency and accuracy activities is also essential to develop well-rounded communicative competence, encompassing discourse, linguistic, interactional, and strategic skills.

Language learning is a complex process influenced by both cognitive and affective factors, with recent research increasingly emphasizing the crucial role of emotions. While cognitive factors were initially the primary focus of research, affective factors, particularly emotions and individual differences like self-confidence, are now recognized as pivotal. Emotions, defined as interactions between variables controlled by neural and hormonal systems, generate motivated behaviors and influence both positive and negative experiences. Krashen's affective filter hypothesis highlighted the role of emotions in language acquisition, suggesting that negative emotions can hinder learning. While positive emotions are generally encouraged, negative emotions like anxiety and fear, especially the fear of making mistakes in speaking, significantly impact learners' performance. Therefore, addressing and mitigating negative emotions is crucial for creating a more effective and comprehensible language learning environment. Ignoring these affective factors can destabilize the learning process (Salihoglu, 2024).

The central research gap addressed by this study in the local context of the University of Cebu Pardo and Talisay is the lack of a localized, evidence-based framework for developing differentiated learning activities in English grammar for Grade 12 STEM students. This gap stems from an insufficient understanding of the specific challenges these second language learners face, the affective and cognitive factors (such as L1 interference, motivation, and learning style preferences) that influence their grammar acquisition, and the effectiveness of current teaching strategies (interaction-based vs. explicit instruction) on their performance within the local setting. By connecting the theoretical support of the Dunn and Dunn Learning Styles Model and the institutional support of DepEd Order No. 35 with practical data, the study aims to fill this void by providing proposals for targeted, differentiated instructional materials for teachers.

Furthermore, the acquisition of L2 grammar is greatly impacted by individual learner variations, including age, motivation, learning preferences, and past language learning experience. For instance, cognitive

issues and ingrained L1 behaviors may provide distinct problems for adult learners than for younger ones. According to Dörnyei (2020), student motivation and attitudes about the target language and its culture are also important factors in determining how well they learn, including grammar.

The primary objective of this research was to thoroughly investigate the challenges faced by senior high school Grade 11 STEM students at the University of Cebu Pardo and Talisay in achieving grammar competence during the academic year 2024-2025 and, subsequently, to identify effective strategies and approaches to enhance their grammar acquisition, which served as the basis for developing differentiated learning activities in English. Specifically, the study sought to profile the students based on their age and gender, and to assess their current level of grammar competence concerning both interaction-based approaches and explicit grammar instruction. Furthermore, it aimed to pinpoint the key factors that influenced grammar acquisition, categorized as exposure, first language influence, and instructional strategies, and to determine the common difficulties students encountered. Finally, the research tested whether there was a significant difference between the teaching strategies utilized and the students' performance, concluding with the proposal of the aforementioned differentiated learning activities.

Theoretical Background

This research assumed that there were challenges faced by the learners in achieving the grammar competence of grade 11-STEM students in the University of Cebu, Pardo, and Talisay.

This research study was supported by Dunn and Dunn's Theory of Instruction and the Philippine DepEd Order No. 35, Series of 2016.

Theory of instruction. This theory highlights its emphasis on tailored education. The approach acknowledges that students have innate preferences for how they learn best and that when these preferences are acknowledged and accommodated, learning becomes more effective and interesting. Dunn and Dunn's theory takes a multidimensional method that categorizes student preferences into five essential elements. They also stressed the importance of moderating elements for learning, both internal and external influences. The internal factors are emotional, physiological, and psychological, while external factors are environmental and sociological.

Both factors are important for grammatical competence development because they impact how well students learn and practice language structures.

Internal factors: motivation and persistence (emotional). Motivated and persistent students are more likely to grapple with confusing grammatical rules, engage in practice tasks, and persevere when facing challenges. Information processing (psychological) and understanding a student's preferred processing method (analytic vs. global) might assist in adapting training. Analytic learners gain from breaking down grammatical principles step by step, but global learners may understand grammar better when provided in context or via pictures.

External factors: Environment (sensory), lighting, temperature, and noise can all have a substantial influence on attention and concentration. A well-managed atmosphere reduces distractions and helps pupils to focus their mental energy on mastering grammar. Instructional methods (Sociological): Some students learn grammar better through individual study, while others gain from group contact and conversations. Providing alternatives for chosen learning techniques promotes better comprehension and practice. Time of day (Physiological): Students who are more awake at a certain time of day may learn grammatical ideas more efficiently during those hours. Grammar courses that are intelligently scheduled can help students learn more effectively.

Philippine DepEd Order No. 35, Series of 2016. In line with the implementation of Republic Act No. 10533, also known as the Enhanced Basic Education Act, the Philippine Department of Education published the Education Act of 2013, a policy regarding the Learning Action Cell (LAC) as a school-based professional development strategy for improving teaching and learning. The policy intends to facilitate the continuous professional development of its teaching personnel based on the notion of lifelong learning and the department's commitment to enhancing the instructor's potential.

The Department of Education prepares to promote and safeguard the rights of Filipinos who are entitled to quality basic education that is egalitarian, culturally relevant, and comprehensive. As a result, they reach their full potential and contribute to the nation's development. DepEd also acknowledges that quality learning is vital. Significantly impacted by quality instruction in the classroom. Therefore, it is critical to recruit highly competent teachers and encourage their professional development as they advance in their careers.

A Learning Action Cell (LAC) consists of educators who participate in collaborative and unified learning sessions to address shared issues faced in the school, assisted by the school head or a designated LAC leader. LACs will develop into constructive school-based communities of practice and caring and safe environments.

Key parts of the approach include continual collaboration. Learning or problem-solving within a common sphere of professional interest, self-directed learning, reflective practice resulting in action and self-evaluation, and collective competency. To enhance the teaching-learning process, which will result in improved learning among learners, promote great instructors, and empower them to encourage each other to consistently enhance their skills and instructional expertise. Practice, abilities, and attitudes, and developing a professional collaborative atmosphere as a whole are the objectives of this policy. During the LAC sessions, the outcome of this current investigation may be shared.

In conclusion, assessing the Dunn and Dunn Learning Styles Model in the context of this study on grammar learning by second language learners is valuable. Understanding learners' diverse preferences for environmental, instructional, emotional, and social components of learning allows researchers to investigate how various styles may impact the obstacles children experience when studying language.

This information may then be utilized to create focused teaching techniques that cater to these various learning styles, perhaps leading to more successful strategies for obtaining grammatical competence in second-language learners.

Hence, the Dunn and Dunn Learning Style model and DepEd Order No. 35, Series of 2016, were strong supporting frameworks for this study because both addressed the diverse learning needs of English as a second language students and provided a practical avenue for teachers to implement differentiated instruction. The Dunn and Dunn model, by highlighting individual learning preferences across environmental, emotional, sociological, and physiological elements, identifies specific learning obstacles ESL learners face. DepEd Order No. 35, through its promotion of Learning Action Cells (LACs), offers a collaborative platform for teachers to share best practices, reflect on their teaching methods, and develop targeted interventions based on these individual needs. This combined approach supports the investigation of how teachers can leverage LACs to implement strategies catering to various learning styles, ultimately impacting the effectiveness of ESL instruction and student performance.

Statement of the problem

This research delved into the challenges faced by senior high school grade-11 STEM students at the University of Cebu Pardo and Talisay during the academic year 2024-2025 in achieving grammar competence and identified potential strategies and approaches to enhance

grammar acquisition as a basis for differentiated learning activities in English.

Specifically, it answered the following questions:

1. What are the profiles of the students in terms of:
 - 1.1 age, and
 - 1.2 gender?
2. What is the grammar competence of the students in terms of:
 - 2.1 subject-verb-agreement
 - 2.2 relative clause,
 - 2.3 preposition,
 - 2.4 pronoun,
 - 2.5 verb,
 - 2.6 conjunction, and
 - 2.7 determiners?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the respondents' profiles and grammar competence?
4. What are the common challenges students encounter in acquiring grammar competence?
 - 4.1 exposure,
 - 4.2 first language influence, and
 - 4.3 instructional strategies?
5. What are the effective strategies for enhancing the grammar competence of respondents?
 - 5.1 interaction-based instruction, and
 - 5.2 explicit grammar instruction?
6. Based on the findings, what differentiated learning activities in English can be proposed?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents the related literature that strengthens the study. Alaviyya and Babayev (2023) emphasized that learning a second language is not simple. Acquiring English as a second language is significantly more challenging, especially if you are studying English in a country where English is not the official language. A shift to using English as the medium of instruction is likely to be accompanied by linguistic challenges (Galloway & Ruegg, 2020).

Some of the most common challenges faced by language learners, particularly non-native speakers, include a limited vocabulary that limits their ability to fully express themselves, the difficulty of constructing grammatically correct sentences, the sheer vastness of the English language with its many variations, and the fact that

the language itself evolves. Moses and Mohammad (2019) found that students struggle to develop strong writing skills due to the inherent complexities of English grammar and vocabulary. Errors in subject-verb agreement become increasingly prevalent, and it appears that many individuals are either no longer aware of the rules or just diminish the relevance of grammatical rules as long as they can deliver their point. Sioco and De Vera (2018), as well as Alaviyya and Babayev (2023), stated that one of the reasons why this problem is difficult to address, because of untrained teachers, is that most nations have English language learners, making it difficult to determine who is a proficient English teacher and who is unskilled. Students just accept everything the teacher teaches, whether it is right or wrong. Instances like these might generate confusion among students since different instructors tell them different things.

One of the primary reasons for this issue is the difficulties that instructors confront when translating or interpreting from their mother tongues to the target language. Babayev and Nuri (2023) found that unqualified or uninspiring teachers can stifle student motivation, while a lack of resources can hinder the learning process. Perhaps the most detrimental factor, however, is teacher domination, which prevents students from actively engaging with the language and practicing their skills. Al-khreshah and Orak (2021) added that negative factors that originate from a teacher include teachers failing to correct students' pronunciation, teachers being too lazy to correct students' pronunciation, whether the students' pronunciation is accurate or bad, and teachers being unaware that pronunciation is vital in English communication. Effective instructors can impact their pupils' success in a variety of ways. Specifically, Palou (2020) argues that teachers have a substantial influence on molding learners' knowledge of English grammar. Alqahtani (2022) added that it is significant for English teachers to have a basic knowledge of language acquisition theories, as it directly influences their ability to provide appropriate content instructions.

According to Kamasak et al. (2020), when it comes to grammar, the route to near-native fluency can carry potential drawbacks. The expectation of mimicking native speakers can put a lot of strain on trainees. This relentless pursuit of grammatical correctness can be frustrating, especially for those still learning the complexities of English structure. The immensity and intricacies of the language itself provide another element of complexity. Mastering all the complexities of English grammatical rules, including exceptions and variants, may be a daunting task. This pressure, along with the sheer volume of knowledge, can cause learners to feel anxious

and discouraged, thus impeding their development. (Tran, 2020) High speaking rates and unusual terminology may influence learners' listening and understanding. Additionally, in parsing issues, Indonesian students have experienced difficulties in understanding syntactic and semantic structures (Winarta & Rahmanu, 2020). Particular errors children commit, such as the misuse of articles, prepositions, and verb tenses. These findings imply that effectively teaching learners English grammar necessitates specialized ways to overcome these typical syntax issues.

As claimed by Aizawa et al. (2023), the vitality of the English language is vital for academic achievement. A key component of this ability is developing excellent grammatical skills. However, this itinerary is packed with pitfalls. English grammar, with its intricacies, exceptions, and variants, may be a major challenge for students. Mastering verb conjugations, accurate tense use, subject-verb agreement, and other grammatical principles requires dedication and practice. Furthermore, a learner's original language might impact their English grammar. Differences in sentence structure, word order, and grammatical ideas might make it difficult to transmit information and achieve fluency with proper grammar. Finally, insufficient exposure to grammatically accurate English might impede growth. Learners who lack opportunities to hear and practice spoken English with good grammar may struggle to build fluency, reflecting excellent grammar skills.

Nevertheless, obtaining fluency has several benefits that go beyond academic performance. First and foremost, fluency strengthens communication. Imagine being able to communicate effectively and confidently in a global language, allowing you to interact with individuals from all backgrounds. Second, fluency improves professional opportunities. In today's linked world, multilingualism is a great skill in several areas. Employers are increasingly looking for workers who can successfully interact across cultures. Finally, fluency leads to a better comprehension of another culture. Language is inextricably related to culture, and acquiring fluency helps you to dive into its complexities, appreciate its literature, and get a better perspective on the globe as a whole.

As learners transition back to traditional classrooms with live teachers, a welcome change after the pandemic's remote learning era, a crucial challenge emerged: the impact of limited interaction on language acquisition. Many learners who spent significant time studying online may now struggle with aspects of language learning that rely heavily on in-person interaction. The student's motivation and limited language exposure hinder learners' progress.

As explained by Nanquil (2021), beyond the logistical changes of returning to the classroom, a significant challenge lies in rekindling student motivation for grammar acquisition. The shift to online learning during the pandemic might have created a gap in their confidence and enthusiasm. Some students may now dislike grammar lessons, fearing they might not be able to participate actively or produce grammatically correct work after a period of potentially less structured online learning. This lack of motivation can be a significant hurdle, hindering their progress in mastering grammar skills. Furthermore, the pandemic itself likely restricted students' exposure to environments where they could practice and hear proper English grammar use. Limited opportunities to engage in conversations, listen to lectures, or read complex texts in person can make it more difficult for them to internalize grammatical rules effectively.

Based on the study by Reyes et al. (2021), exposed indigenous learners to conversational English problems. Include the perspective that they have difficulties with the English language. For instance, having a weak linguistic vocabulary. Their problems include their anxieties and lack of confidence. Learners cope with their issues by conducting research and observing people on television. They also consult the dictionary. The researchers suggested the module will be utilized by indigenous pupils, including grammar, writing, reading, and vocabulary, as additional activities for the pupils where they can boost their speaking abilities, confidence, vocabulary, and understanding of English.

According to Adharbi (2021), mastering a language might feel like breaking a complicated code. The sheer number of rules, exceptions, and variations in a language such as English may be intimidating. This lack of evident and intuitive structure is a significant impediment to gaining grammatical competence. If pupils do not comprehend the basic logic of grammatical rules, they will have difficulties applying them successfully in their language use. Concerning this, several grammatical mistakes and problems arose among students when learning English due to their lack of knowledge and experience with lexis and grammar in their daily lives. Ajaj (2022), according to the research findings, students continue to struggle with learning the English language, particularly its grammar, and they need to improve at the grammatical, semantic, and pragmatic levels that manifest in their spoken or written language. A descriptive methodology was utilized in this research by reviewing the previous literature.

As believed by Djurayeva et al. (2020), learners face various barriers and challenges in acquiring grammar competence. However, the researchers highlighted in the

study that there are a few creative methods for enhancing the learners' progress, such as diagramming sentences, deductive teaching, and interactive teaching. By engaging students visually, encouraging them to discover grammar rules through exploration, and fostering interaction, these methods transform grammar from a code to be deciphered into a skill to be actively practiced and mastered.

Concerned about a reduction in student writing quality, this study looked into the obstacles that first-year university students confront in Kenya. The study revealed two major concerns through content analysis of 50 students' essays: content issues, such as concept organization and growth, and structural issues with language, punctuation, and sentence structure. The study's goal is to use these data to create techniques for helping students improve their academic writing skills (Mwangi, 2017).

In Indonesia, as explained by Sorohiti et al. (2024), where English is not the native language, teachers struggle to make grammar fascinating for learners. This qualitative study conducted interviews with instructors to better understand these problems. According to the findings, the most significant barriers were a lack of enthusiasm and inadequate language exposure. Teachers address this using engaging strategies such as guided sentence creation and games, which make grammar instruction more interesting and effective. In line with the study, Batubara & Mahardhika's (2020) research conducted at an Indonesian institution found that many fourth-semester English students had difficulty transitioning from active to passive voice. The most prevalent challenges discovered were determining the subject, utilizing the auxiliary verb "be," and generating the past participle of verbs, especially in the past continuous tense. While some students displayed a good understanding of passive voice, the study shows that grammar training should be enhanced to meet these specific issues.

Rahmotullah (2020) highlighted that the amount and level of grammatical competency necessary for effective higher education are rarely addressed in the formal academic English teaching system. So, a huge gap was observed in the grammar teaching. Currently, the upper secondary education system level, the appropriate degree of grammatical instruction, and the necessary degree of grammatical instruction are lacking for effective grammar instruction. Consequently, the learners, higher secondary students, have been struggling in both their academics and their future careers. To fill the gap, researchers improve the Higher Secondary Grammar Teaching System by designing and implementing it based

on the current situations and requirements of our young ones.

The study investigated the challenges faced by teachers in achieving students' spoken English fluency in the Philippines. Despite a national policy emphasizing communicative language teaching, students aren't reaching the desired level of proficiency. The study explores the gap between policy and practice, suggesting that teachers struggle with a dilemma: adhering to policy or finding more effective methods. By examining the experiences of 30 teachers through observation and interviews, the research aims to identify solutions for both teachers and policymakers to improve the quality of English language education and achieve true communicative competence among students (Azam et al., 2021).

In the study by Nadesan and Shah (2020), Malaysian students struggle to speak English confidently, despite years of practice. This study reveals non-linguistic problems such as nervousness, lack of confidence, and fear of making errors that limit their capacity to talk.

According to Daar (2020), students have little enthusiasm for learning to speak English. This aspect makes individuals unwilling to learn. It also disrupts the students' learning attention. Quinones (2022) challenges that have been faced while mastering grammar involve remembering the rules. Integrating the rules themselves. Grammar is an area wherein you need to follow a certain guideline to express what you want to say. Celi & Kocaman (2016) discussed numerous obstacles that make gaining grammatical precision difficult for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. Traditional grammar education techniques and insufficient exposure to actual English usage might impede fluency and correctness. Learners' native languages (L1) may interfere with their grasp of English grammar, resulting in problems in word order and sentence structure.

Language anxiety can restrict students' ability to acquire grammar and prior knowledge, and encountering unusual terms is also an important hurdle for students in developing linguistic competency.

As believed by Olagbaju (2021), prior knowledge has an important role in second language learning. Prior knowledge refers to all of a learner's applicable abilities, aptitude, and know-how before encountering a new body of knowledge or information. Previous experience assists in memory or transfer of knowledge, and it might take the shape of either misunderstandings or alternate ideas. Research in the field of learning engagement, Dong et al. (2020, examined the effect of previous knowledge on grammar acquisition utilizing the idea of cognitive load. The findings indicate that learners with more previous

knowledge had a lower cognitive strain when encountering new grammatical structures.

Research done at SMPN 1 Baki during the 2023/2024 academic year looked into the problems that instructors experience when offering grammar teaching. The study found three main challenges: choosing appropriate teaching techniques, inspiring students to interact with grammar, and ensuring a thorough knowledge of the content (Muhamad, 2023). These findings illustrate the difficulty of developing grammatical competence in kids.

While writing skills are frequently highlighted, grammar serves as the basis for clear and successful communication. When your writing feels awkward or cumbersome, it's usually a clue that you need to brush up on your grammar. Solid grammar serves as the framework that supports your ideas, ensuring that they are presented in an intelligible and interesting manner for the reader.

In the study (Lee, 2020), numerous issues were associated with grammar understanding and its impact on writing effectiveness. First, it acknowledges the past lack of attention on writing teaching, which has resulted in a skills gap among students. This disconnect is exacerbated by the multifarious nature of writing, which necessitates not just grammatical expertise but also idea production, organization, and vocabulary selection (Febriana, 2022). Identifies grammar application as a specific area of difficulty that may contribute to pupil demotivation. Overall, a lack of emphasis on grammatical understanding is cited as a serious impediment to developing writing skills that also impact acquiring grammar competence.

The literature study identifies many problems that learners experience when developing grammatical competence. These include the intrinsic complexity of the English language, insufficient exposure to grammatically accurate English, and the bad impacts from teachers. Additionally, learners' native languages may interfere with their comprehension of English grammar. On the other hand, other research indicates that innovative teaching approaches and a concentration on real-world English use can help learners overcome these obstacles. Overall, the findings emphasize the significance of excellent grammar education in building strong writing abilities.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section presents the design, flow of the study, environment, respondents, instrument, data-gathering procedures, data analysis, statistical treatment, and scoring procedures.

Design

This study employed a mixed-method research design, which integrated both quantitative and qualitative data to achieve its objectives. The quantitative phase focused on identifying the weak points of Grade 11 STEM senior high school students in grammar acquisition, achieved through the distribution of a descriptive questionnaire to 41 student participants. This phase also aimed to determine the significant relationship between the students' demographic profiles and their grammar competence. The qualitative phase utilized an intensive questionnaire (semi-structured interview) with two groups. Five English teachers were interviewed to determine the effective pedagogical strategies and, more specifically, to ascertain whether students learn best through explicit or interactive instruction in grammar. Concurrently, nine students were randomly selected from the 41 questionnaire respondents and interviewed to gain deeper qualitative insight into their grammar acquisition challenges and learning preferences.

Flow of the Study

Figure 2 presents the flow of the study, which covered the entire research activity. The input considers the potential weaknesses of the students for acquiring grammar competence, the significant relationship between students' profiles and grammar competence, and the challenges or barriers in grammar acquisition. Included in the process are the distribution of a survey questionnaire, data collection, an in-depth questionnaire administered through Google Forms, statistical treatment, analysis, and interpretation of data. The findings of the study are the basis for proposing differentiated learning activities in English.

Locale of the Study

This study was conducted at the University of Cebu Pardo and Talisay (UC-PT), which offered the English subject, for which the teaching strategies involved in the study are to be utilized by the English teachers in this subject. UC-PT is located at Natalio B. Bacalso Ave., Cebu South Road, Brgy. Bulacao Pardo, Cebu City, 6000. The school offers a K-12 basic education program that has both junior and senior high schools. The senior high school department offers academic tracks such as Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), Accountancy, Business, and Management (ABM), and General Academics (GAS). Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS). University of Cebu Pardo and Talisay also offer bachelor's degrees such as BSSED, BEED, BSN, BSIT, and more.

Respondents

The University of Cebu- Pardo and Talisay senior high school Grade-11 Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) students were the respondents. STEM is one of the academic strands offered by the school. The descriptive survey method was utilized in the study. Specifically, there were 41 students from UCPT. Five teachers from the same school were also the informants of this study. It had a total of 46 respondents. They were given a survey questionnaire to identify the weaknesses in acquiring grammar competence.

Then, the English teachers utilized the teaching strategies for their students in their English classes. The collaborative participation of the respondents greatly contributed to the attainment of the study's objectives.

The Grade 11 STEM students were selected using purposive sampling because they represent a critical population requiring a high level of grammatical competence for success in tertiary education and their science-focused field. Their final-year status allowed the researchers to access their recent performance history and established learning preferences (per the Dunn and Dunn model). Ultimately, targeting this specific group at the University of Cebu Pardo and Talisay ensured that the study's main output—the differentiated learning activities—was maximally relevant and effective for a defined, high-stakes academic population.

Data-gathering Procedure

In this process, the different phases in the data-gathering procedure were presented. Ethics forms were first submitted to the UC Banilad Research Office for the confidentiality of the respondents. A letter of request was then given to the school principal/Campus Affairs Director (CAD) asking permission to use the University of Cebu Pardo and Talisay, respectively, as the locale of the study. When the school principal/CAD granted permission, a letter of request was sent to the English teachers of the student respondents, asking them about potential approaches or strategies to use to improve students' grammar proficiency and the challenges or barriers in grammar acquisition. After the permission was granted, arrangements with the respondents on the date of the administration of the questionnaires were made. Retrieval of data was done right after the administration.

Data Analysis

The themes were derived through a rigorous qualitative methodology, specifically Colaizzi's method, which was deemed appropriate for the content analysis of the qualitative data. The researcher diligently adhered to the following seven steps, ensuring the data was regularly

reviewed, verified, and bracketed throughout the process to maintain reliability and accuracy.

The theme derivation process unfolded as follows:

First, the researcher used an online platform (Google Forms) to collect all responses, which were then transcribed verbatim. The researcher repeatedly reread the transcriptions to achieve immersion and a comprehensive sense of the data.

Second, the transcripts were thoroughly examined to select and analyze crucial words or statements provided by the respondents. This allowed the researcher to pinpoint the significant statements that directly related to the study's phenomenon.

Third, formulated meanings were created based on the accumulated significant statements. This step required the researcher to continuously rely on and compare the initial transcripts, the crucial statements, and the developed interpretations from each respondent to ensure fidelity.

Fourth, the constructed explanations formulated meanings were grouped into emergent themes. The researcher thoroughly checked and compared each transcription and theme cluster, ensuring the reliability and accuracy of the resulting themes.

Fifth, the findings were utilized to construct a full and detailed statement and description of the participants' lived experiences regarding the phenomenon under investigation.

Sixth, to ensure the consistency and validation of the data, the researcher went over the full description with the involved participants who took part in the study.

Finally, to achieve absolute fidelity with the respondents' lived experiences, the researcher considered any fresh and relevant information extracted from the respondents' final validation, thereby finalizing the fundamental structure of the themes.

Treatment of Data

A total of forty-one (41) student participants answered the quantitative survey questionnaire. The data gathered from the quantitative part of this research, specifically the participant performance scores, were treated using descriptive statistics to summarize and describe the characteristics of the sample.

Since the study's objective is to assess the participants' level of performance, the primary statistical tool utilized was the Percentage Average Method. This method provides a clear, standardized measure of performance relative to the highest possible score, allowing for straightforward interpretation of the results.

The following formula was used to calculate the average percentage of the participants' scores:

where P = Percentage

n= number of respondents

f is the frequency of correct answers

$$P = \frac{f}{n} \times 100$$

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter presents the gathered quantitative data analyzed through descriptive statistics and an intensive or in-depth questionnaire. The qualitative data analysis is based on the written transcripts of the five teachers and nine students, and forty-one students for descriptive purposes. The data are collected from a survey questionnaire and Google Form interviews with open-ended questions.

Table 1 Demographic Profile of the Respondents

n=41

The demographic profile of the 41 respondents reveals a group that is slightly more female than male.

Profile	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex		
Male	18	43.90%
Female	23	56.10%
Age		
16	24	58.54%
17	17	41.46%

Specifically, 23 of the respondents were female, accounting for 56.09% of the sample, while 18 respondents were male, representing 43.90%. In terms of age, the respondents were either 16 or 17 years old. The majority of the participants, 24 individuals, were 16 years old, making up 58.54% of the total. The remaining 17 respondents were 17 years old, constituting 41.46% of the sample. Therefore, the study participants were primarily female and predominantly 16 years of age.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics Questionnaire

Questions	Frequency	Percentage	Transmuted	Interpretation
1. The economic and social initiatives contained in the new bill _____ our future well-being, according to a government spokesperson.	28	68.29%	80	Satisfactory
2. The finance committee _____ a new report for each meeting, outlining recent spending and earnings.	29	70.73%	81	Satisfactory
3. The relevant financial data _____ compiled by the team over an intense week of research and evaluation.	8	19.51%	81	Satisfactory
4. Each member and team leader _____ committed to working together to meet the new deadline.	9	21.95%	64	Did Not Meet Expectations
5. A number of the people who were rescued from the burning building _____ been hospitalized for smoke inhalation, but the exact number _____ not been determined.	22	53.66%	73	Did Not Meet Expectations
6. At Botanical Bay, a tide pool full of sea anemones, clams, and sea urchins also _____ a small starfish.	21	51.22%	72	Did Not Meet Expectations
7. After Kai's parties, most of the people _____ willing to stay and help clean up.	27	65.85%	78	Fairly Satisfactory
8. The teacher explained that there _____ several effective approaches to creating a thesis statement.	31	75.61%	84	Satisfactory
9. Each instance of bullying or intimidation in children under school age _____ long-term effects on the socialization process.	20	48.78%	72	Did Not Meet Expectations
10. Jostling for position by the stage with cameras poised _____ the dancers' adoring parents.	30	73.17%	83	Satisfactory
11. Which relative pronoun cannot be used in an adding relative clause?	9	21.95%	65	Did Not Meet Expectations
12. Which preposition is used with dates?	0	0.00%	60	Did Not Meet Expectations
13. Which word is a reflexive pronoun?	19	46.34%	71	Did Not Meet Expectations
14. Which verb is the past perfect form?	20	48.78%	72	Did Not Meet Expectations
15. Which modal verb expresses ability?	35	85.37%	90	Outstanding

16.Which phrase is the passive form?	12	29.27%	67	Did Not Meet Expectations
17.I _____ working all afternoon and have just finished the assignment.	16	39.02%	69	Did Not Meet Expectations
18.Rohan _____ before he read the review.	16	39.02%	69	Did Not Meet Expectations
19.He _____ in the States but he still does not have a command over the English language.	30	73.17%	83	Satisfactory
20. By the next month, we shall _____ the project.	27	65.85%	78	Fairly Satisfactory
21.Every boy and girl _____ in the class today.	12	29.27%	67	Did Not Meet Expectations
22.Identify the tense used in the sentence. 'Here comes the soon-to-be bride!'	9	21.95%	65	Did Not Meet Expectations
23.Identify the tense used in the following sentence. "We are going to reach the destination as scheduled."	4	9.76%	62	Did Not Meet Expectations
24.Our friends visit us _____ they are free.	40	97.56%	98	Outstanding
25.I saw Helen _____ she was getting off the bus.	41	100.00%	100	Outstanding
26.I can neither sing _____ dance.	37	90.24%	93	Outstanding
27.I missed the bus _____ I arrived late for the meeting.	34	82.93%	89	Very Satisfactory
28.After this tour, you have _____ whole afternoon free to explore the city.	29	70.73%	81	Satisfactory
29.Carol's father works as _____ electrician.	34	83.93%	89	Very Satisfactory
30.Their car does 140 miles _____ hour.	36	87.80%	92	Outstanding
31.Where's _____ USB drive I lent you last week?	41	100.00%	100	Outstanding
32.I _____ arrange the flowers for the bouquet.	34	82.93%	89	Very Satisfactory
33.If Suzan said that, it _____ true. She never lies.	32	78.05%	86	Very Satisfactory
34.I'm not sure I trust Peter. He _____ the person we think he is.	7	17.07%	64	Did Not Meet Expectations
35.Paul is behaving in a very unusual way. I think he _____ again.	37	92.68%	95	Outstanding

This table presents the results of the survey questionnaire, detailing the frequency and percentage of responses for each question, along with a transmuted score and an interpretation.

The survey questionnaire results reveal varied understandings of English language concepts among the student respondents. While certain areas demonstrated strong comprehension, as evidenced by the "Outstanding" and "Very Satisfactory" interpretations for questions

concerning modal verbs, conjunctions, prepositions, and verb tenses, other areas indicate a significant need for improvement. Specifically, a substantial number of questions, interpreted as "Did Not Meet Expectations," highlight difficulties in subject-verb agreement, the identification of specific pronoun types, verb tenses, and the relative clause. Notably, no student correctly identified the preposition used with dates. The "Satisfactory" and "Fairly Satisfactory" responses suggest a moderate level of

understanding in some grammatical structures. The transmuted scores generally align with the percentage of correct answers, providing a numerical representation of student performance on each question. Overall, the survey data suggest that while the students have grasped some English language concepts effectively, there are critical areas where their understanding is weak and requires targeted educational intervention.

The students' overall performance in the grammar survey paints a complex, yet familiar, picture for second language educators. While the results commendably demonstrate a grasp of certain functional concepts, such as modal verbs and conjunctions, the data simultaneously illuminates critical and persistent gaps, mirroring challenges long recognized in the field of English as a Second Language (ESL) acquisition. The significant struggles observed in Subject-Verb Agreement (SVA), for example, are highly consistent with research identifying this structure as one of the most resistant to complete mastery across various proficiency levels. Similarly, the widespread difficulties with verb tenses and the core problem of applying correct aspectual rules directly affirm existing literature on the subject, particularly noting the complicating factor of first language (L1) interference (Diaubalick & Guijarro, 2019). Furthermore, the notably low scores in prepositions and complex structures like the relative clause are predictable, as prepositions are notoriously irregular and frequently succumb to L1 transfer errors (Soomro, 2022). Ultimately, the survey serves as a vital diagnostic tool, validating the necessity for focused, strategic instructional intervention to solidify these fundamental grammatical building blocks.

Table 3 Grammatical Concepts

SUBJECT- VERB- AGREEMENT				
Questions	Frequency	Percentage	Transmuted	Interpretation
No. 1-10	225	54.88	73	Did Not Meet Expectations
RELATIVE CLAUSE				
No. 11	9	21.95	65	Did Not Meet Expectations
PREPOSITION (P.O.S)				
No. 12	0	0	0	Did Not Meet

				Expectations
PRONOUN (P.O.S)				
No.13	19	46.34%	71	Did Not Meet Expectations
VERB (P.O.S)				
No. 14-23	181	44.15	71	Did Not Meet Expectations
CONJUNCTION (P.O.S)				
No. 24-27	152	92.68	95	Outstanding
DETERMINERS (P.O.S)				
No. 28-31	140	85.37	90	Outstanding
MODAL VERBS (P.O.S)				
No. 32-35	110	67.07	79	Fairly Satisfactory

The analysis of student responses specifically for questions 1 through 10, which focused on subject-verb agreement, indicates that this is an area of difficulty for the respondents. With a total frequency of 225 correct answers across these ten questions, the average percentage of correct responses was 54.88%, resulting in a transmuted score of 73. According to the interpretation provided, this level of performance falls under "Did Not Meet Expectations." This suggests that, on average, the students struggled with the principles of subject-verb agreement tested in the initial part of the survey. Therefore, it can be concluded that the respondents need further instruction and practice to improve their understanding and application of subject-verb agreement rules.

The focused analysis on Subject-Verb Agreement (SVA) items (Questions 1-10) confirmed that this grammar point is a major hurdle, with an average score of 54.88%, resulting in an interpretation of "Did Not Meet Expectations." This low mastery level is strongly supported by academic literature, which consistently identifies SVA as one of the most persistent and problematic structures for English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. This difficulty is often compounded by interference from students' native language when they attempt to apply L1 rules to English (Soomro, 2022). In

essence, the data validates a well-known challenge in L2 pedagogy, signaling an urgent need for targeted instruction to improve the practical application of these SVA rules.

The data for Question 11, which assessed understanding of relative clauses, reveals a significant challenge for the student respondents. With only 9 correct answers out of the total, the percentage of correct responses was a low 21.95%, resulting in a transmuted score of 65. Consequently, the interpretation of this performance is "Did Not Meet Expectations." This singular data point strongly suggests that the students in this group have a weak grasp of the specific concept of relative clauses tested in Question 11. This indicates a need for focused instruction and review of relative clauses to improve student comprehension.

The extremely low 21.95% correct response rate for Question 11 on relative clauses indicates a clear and substantial deficiency, warranting an interpretation of "Did Not Meet Expectations." This specific difficulty is a recognized challenge in second language acquisition, as the mastery of complex syntactic structures is a major hurdle for English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. The struggle with relative clauses aligns with the broader problem of "mother tongue interference," in which learners' native-language rules interfere with the acquisition of complex English syntax, vocabulary, and grammar (Soomro, 2022). Furthermore, given the low score, this item provides empirical data supporting the established finding that many students struggle with their overall grammatical competence, the foundational capacity to construct grammatically sound sentences (Sioco & De Vera, 2018). Consequently, this singular data point confirms the need for targeted pedagogical intervention to strengthen students' comprehension and application of complex clause structures.

The data concerning Question 12, which assessed knowledge of prepositions as a part of speech, reveals a critical gap in understanding among the student respondents. With 0 correct answers (0% of responses), the resulting transmuted score is also 0. Consequently, the interpretation of this performance is "Did Not Meet Expectations." This outcome underscores a complete lack of understanding of the specific prepositional concept tested in this question among the surveyed group. This finding highlights a significant weakness in their grammatical knowledge, necessitating focused attention and instruction on prepositions.

The finding for Question 12—which assessed a specific prepositional concept and resulted in zero correct answers (0%)—highlights a critical and absolute comprehension failure, immediately leading to an

interpretation of "Did Not Meet Expectations." This outcome provides strong empirical confirmation of a challenge long acknowledged in language pedagogy. The acquisition of English prepositions is notoriously difficult for English as a Second Language (ESL) learners due to the lack of clear, logical rules; the high number of meanings (polysemy); and the propensity for errors caused by transferring L1 rules. As Rahmotullah (2020) observed, such persistent, deep-seated difficulties in foundational grammar points present significant problems in teaching English at the secondary level, demanding specific analysis and focused solutions. Consequently, this data point necessitates immediate, concentrated instructional effort to address the complete absence of mastery in this particular area of grammatical knowledge.

The data for Question 13, which assessed knowledge of pronouns as a part of speech, indicates that the student respondents faced challenges in this area. With a frequency of 19 correct answers, representing 46.34% of the total responses, the resulting transmuted score was 71. According to the provided interpretation, this level of performance "Did Not Meet Expectations." This suggests that most students did not correctly identify the concept of pronouns tested in this question, highlighting a potential weakness in their understanding of this part of speech. Therefore, further review and instruction on pronouns may be beneficial for this group of students.

The data for Question 13, which assessed knowledge of pronouns as a part of speech, indicates that the student respondents faced challenges in this area. With a frequency of 19 correct answers, representing 46.34% of the total responses, the resulting transmuted score was 71. According to the provided interpretation, this level of performance "Did Not Meet Expectations." This suggests that most students did not correctly identify the concept of pronouns tested in this question, highlighting a potential weakness in their understanding of this part of speech. Therefore, further review and instruction on pronouns may be beneficial for this group of students.

The collective performance of the student respondents on Questions 14 through 23, which centered on verbs as a part of speech, indicates a general lack of mastery in this grammatical area. Across these ten questions, a total of 181 correct answers were recorded, resulting in an average percentage of 44.15% and a corresponding transmuted score of 71. The overall performance interpretation is "Did Not Meet Expectations," indicating that, on average, students struggled with the verb-related concepts assessed. This outcome suggests that a substantial portion of the respondents need further instruction and reinforcement on

various aspects of verbs to improve their understanding and application of this fundamental part of speech.

The collective performance on Questions 14 through 23, which assessed various aspects of verbs, confirms a systemic lack of mastery, with the resulting average correct rate of 44.15% interpreted as "Did Not Meet Expectations." This pervasive difficulty with verb-related concepts is a clear indicator of a learning difficulty that demands targeted educational solutions. As Sorohiti et al. (2024) emphasized, effective grammar instruction relies heavily on a teacher's awareness and proper identification of such difficulties to implement successful teaching strategies. Therefore, the data empirically validate the necessity of comprehensive and strategic instructional reinforcement to solidify students' comprehension and application of this fundamental part of speech.

The collective performance of the student respondents on Questions 24-27, which assessed their understanding of conjunctions as a part of speech, was remarkably strong. Across these four questions, a total of 152 correct answers were recorded, resulting in an average of 92.68% and a corresponding transmuted score of 95. The overall performance is "Outstanding," indicating that the students, as a group, have a very good grasp of the conjunction concepts tested. This suggests that the students have a solid understanding of how to use and identify conjunctions within sentences.

The students' performance on Questions 24 through 27, which assessed conjunctions, was notably successful, achieving a high 92.68% average correct rate and an "Outstanding" interpretation. This high level of mastery demonstrates a solid grasp of conjunction concepts (External Research on Parts of Speech). This success is important, as conjunctions are critical function words that enable students to logically connect sentence components, a vital skill for more complex written and spoken communication (External Research on Parts of Speech). This outcome thus validates that the instructional strategies used for these easily defined, discrete concepts were highly effective, underscoring the positive impact of proper teacher awareness and successful teaching strategies on grammar mastery (Sorohiti et al, 2024).

The collective performance of the student respondents on Questions 28 through 31, which assessed their understanding of determiners as a part of speech, was excellent. Across these four questions, a total of 140 correct answers were recorded, resulting in a high average percentage of 85.37% and a corresponding transmuted score of 90. The interpretation of this overall performance is "Outstanding," indicating that the students, as a group, have a strong command of the determiner concepts that

were tested. This suggests that the students have a solid understanding of how to use and identify determiners within sentences.

The assessment of Questions 28 through 31 on determiners reveals a strong success story, with the 85.37% average correct rate earning an "Outstanding" evaluation. This high level of mastery directly validates the students' grammatical competence, signifying a robust capacity to comprehend and construct grammatically sound sentences in this domain (Sioco & De Vera, 2018). As determiners are crucial function words that establish clarity and specificity for nouns in discourse, this solid understanding is a vital building block for more advanced communication skills. The strong result here contrasts favorably with other areas of difficulty, suggesting that the concepts tested were acquired successfully by the majority of the student group.

The collective performance of the student respondents on Questions 32 through 35, which assessed their understanding of modal verbs as a part of speech, indicates a "fairly satisfactory" level of comprehension. Across these four questions, a total of 110 correct answers were recorded, resulting in an average percentage of 67.07% and a corresponding transmuted score of 79. This suggests that while a majority of the students have a basic understanding of modal verbs, there is still potential for them to deepen their knowledge and improve their accuracy in this area of grammar. Further review and practice could help solidify their understanding of modal verbs.

The assessment of Questions 32 through 35, which focused on modal verbs, yielded a 67.07% average correct rate, resulting in a "Fairly Satisfactory" interpretation. While this score suggests a basic understanding of this closed-class system, the moderate result indicates that students are likely struggling with the subtle semantic differences or more complex applications. This pattern of partial mastery is a common teaching problem, as Rahmotullah (2020) noted that persistent, deep-seated difficulties in foundational grammar points demand specific analysis and focused solutions. Addressing this gap is crucial, as the failure to achieve full mastery of such concepts can lead to fossilization—where incorrect patterns become fixed in the learner's language system. Therefore, focused practice is essential to ensure that this basic understanding is successfully integrated into their productive grammar, thus supporting the need for teacher awareness and effective teaching strategies (Sorohiti et al., 2024).

Table 4 Emergent and Clustered Themes of the Teachers' Lived Experiences

Emergent Theme 1: Multifaceted Influence on Grammar Acquisition
Theme 1: The Paradoxical Implications of Incidental Learning
Theme 2: L1 Interference as a Persistent
Theme 3: Direct and Indirect Learning
Theme 4: Interaction and Engagement for Deeper Understanding
Theme 5: Interplay of Knowledge and Confidence

The qualitative data collection involved conducting in-depth interviews with five (5) English teachers to gain insights into their lived experiences and pedagogical strategies. The analysis process used thematic analysis, in which the researcher meticulously reviewed the interview transcripts and formulated meaning from significant statements to identify commonalities among the responses, ultimately leading to the creation of emergent and clustered themes.

This approach significantly strengthens the research findings for several reasons. First, using a homogeneous group of five expert teachers as key informants is generally considered an appropriate sample size for achieving thematic saturation in qualitative studies, ensuring the collected data is rich and in-depth. Second, the process of finding commonality validates the themes not as individual opinions, but as shared professional reality regarding effective strategies (e.g., Direct and Indirect Learning) or prevalent challenges (e.g., L1 Interference). This process ensures that the themes are grounded in the collective, real-world context of English language teaching at the University of Cebu Pardo and Talisay, Inc.

The creation of themes based on the convergence of expert responses directly enhances the trustworthiness and transferability of the study. This thematic approach is consistent with established qualitative methods that prioritize depth of understanding over statistical generalization (Creswell, 2013). By grounding the themes in practitioners' common experience, the findings move from mere observation to pedagogical prescriptions. As noted in the literature, teacher-derived insights are critical because "effective instructors can impact their pupils' success in a variety of ways," making their consensus on effective practice highly valuable for other educators

(Palou, 2020). Furthermore, the emergent themes—such as the influence of the first language (L1) on grammar acquisition—directly support existing academic literature, demonstrating that the teachers' experiences align with broader theoretical challenges in second language learning.

Table 5 Emergent and Clustered Themes of the Students' Lived Experiences

Emergent Theme 2: Multifaceted Nature of English Grammar Acquisition
Theme 2.1: How Experience and Deep Involvement Shape Us
Theme 2.2: The Influence of the First Language L1
Theme 2.3: Impact of Explicit Instruction and Learning Strategies

The qualitative phase of the study, based on in-depth interviews with nine (9) student participants, yielded Emergent Theme 2: Multifaceted Nature of English Grammar Acquisition. This theme was developed by the researcher after identifying a commonality across students' responses regarding their grammar learning experiences and challenges.

The emergence of the term "multifaceted nature" is highly significant, as it moves the study beyond the identification of single, isolated problems. It indicates that grammar competence is not influenced by a single variable but by a complex interplay of internal and external factors, as consistently expressed by the participants. The fact that this theme was synthesized from the common experiences of nine students validates its relevance and centrality to the learners' reality. This theme implies that effective instruction must address several dimensions concurrently: the student's personal cognitive baggage (e.g., L1 influence), their affective state (e.g., confidence/anxiety), and the quality of their learning environment (e.g., instructional strategies and exposure). The commonality found suggests that, regardless of individual differences, all participants recognize grammar acquisition as a holistic challenge shaped by multiple, often interacting, factors.

This qualitative finding strongly corroborates established literature in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) concerning the complexity of mastering English grammar. Aizawa et al. (2020) highlighted that English grammar, with its intricacies, exceptions, and variants, presents a major challenge for students, confirming its inherent complexity. Furthermore, the study's theoretical foundation, the Dunn and Dunn Learning Styles Model, supports the theme by acknowledging that learning is a complex process influenced by a multidimensional

array of emotional, sociological, and environmental factors, all of which contribute to the multifaceted nature observed. The literature explicitly states that L2 learning is influenced by both cognitive factors (such as L1 interference) and affective factors (such as confidence and motivation), which collectively support the researcher's synthesis of a theme that combines all these elements.

Discussions of Qualitative Data

The qualitative analysis of the lived experiences of English teachers and students yielded two central, highly convergent themes. The teachers' interviews converged on Emergent Theme 1: Multifaceted Influence on Grammar Acquisition, reflecting their professional consensus that mastering grammar is a complex process affected by various interconnected elements, including instructional methods, L1 interference, and the balance between knowledge and confidence. This theme was synthesized from the consistent challenges and effective strategies reported by the educators, who collectively recognized the need for diverse approaches such as direct or indirect learning and encouraging interaction for deeper comprehension.

Similarly, the student interviews yielded Emergent Theme 2: Multifaceted Nature of English Grammar Acquisition, identifying a strong commonality across the nine learners' perspectives: grammar competence is not a singular issue, but a challenge shaped by a complex of internal factors -influence and experience, and external factors-explicit instruction and strategies. The convergence of findings in both groups- teachers perceiving a "Multifaceted Influence" and students experiencing a "Multifaceted Nature" -underscored the critical finding of the study. English grammar acquisition is a holistic, multi-dimensional process that requires interventions addressing the cognitive, affective, and linguistic variables simultaneously. The following are themes that emerged from the interview data.

Emergent Theme 1: Multifaceted Influence on Grammar Acquisition

Several key themes concerning grammar acquisition emerged from the data. The role of input is complex, as learners are influenced by multifaceted sources, including both formal instruction and informal exposure, which present paradoxical implications for learning. Learners' first language can also exert a persistent influence on their acquisition of English grammar. Effective grammar instruction involves a combination of explicit and implicit learning strategies. Furthermore, interaction and engagement are crucial for a deeper understanding. Finally, the interplay between knowledge and confidence is significant, as learners' self-assurance

can affect their ability to use and develop their grammatical skills effectively.

Theme 1: The Paradoxical Implications of Incidental Learning

Incidental learning demonstrates that substantial knowledge and skills can be acquired unintentionally through engagement in other activities. This seemingly passive process can lead to surprisingly effective learning outcomes, sometimes rivaling intentional learning, particularly in vocabulary acquisition and tacit knowledge. However, its effectiveness can vary depending on factors like attention, exposure, and the specificity of the learning goals (Kerka, 2000). Participant 1 said, "Listening to songs can help students understand the use of informal language and colloquialisms, which can make them more aware of how grammar functions in real-life communication." This statement was supported when Participant 4 said that "this repeated exposure can make grammatical patterns feel more natural and intuitive, even if they can't explicitly explain the rule."

Listening to songs exposes students to informal language and colloquialisms, enhancing their awareness of real-world grammar. Repeated exposure to songs can also make grammatical patterns feel natural and intuitive, even without explicit rule knowledge. Research on language acquisition supports the idea that authentic input, such as music, improves vocabulary and implicit understanding (Bokiev et al., 2018).

Theme 2: L1 Interference as a Persistent

L1 interference, or language transfer, refers to the persistent influence of a learner's native language (L1) on their second language (L2) acquisition, often leading to errors (Alisoy, 2024). This ongoing impact of L1 patterns on L2 production and comprehension is a key aspect of language learning. Participant 4 emphasized that "When the grammatical structures of a student's L1 align with English, it can act as a springboard. For instance, if a student's L1 also follows a Subject-Verb-Agreement (SVA) word order for basic sentences, they often grasp this fundamental English structure more quickly. This positive transfer can accelerate their initial sentence formation. This is where the L1's grammar rules differ from English, leading to errors. Students might unconsciously apply their L1's grammatical patterns to English. For example, if their L1 doesn't have articles (like "a" or "the"), they might consistently omit them in English, even after explicit instruction. The use of prepositions to indicate location, time, and relationships is often language-specific, leading to frequent mistakes." Participant 1 also said that "If the L1 shares structural similarities with English, such as sentence structure or verb conjugation,

students may find it easier to grasp similar grammatical concepts.”

When a student's first language (L1) shares grammatical structures with English, such as subject-verb agreement, it can facilitate positive transfer, enabling faster comprehension of those English rules. Conversely, differences in grammatical structures, such as the absence of articles or varied preposition usage in the L1, often lead to negative transfer, resulting in common English errors. Shared structural similarities between the L1 and English, such as basic sentence order or verb conjugation, can ease the learning of corresponding English grammatical concepts.

Theme 3: Direct and Indirect Learning

Explicit learning is conscious, intentional learning through instruction and rules, while implicit learning is unconscious acquisition through exposure and practice, as highlighted by Souvik (2023). Both are vital: explicit for foundational knowledge, implicit for intuitive skill development. It was pointed out by participant 2 that “A balanced approach incorporating both inductive and deductive elements is often most successful, catering to diverse learning styles. This contextualized and balanced approach fosters better retention and application of grammar rules in real-world communication.” However, participants 3, 4, and 5 argued that “actively engaging students through fun, low-pressure activities like grammar games and role-playing enhances retention and provides practical application, which aligns well with an inductive “discovery” approach that fosters critical thinking, analysis, and deeper understanding through student-led unraveling, positioning teachers as facilitators in this process.”

A balanced approach that combines inductive “discovery” with deductive instruction caters to different learning styles and promotes better retention and real-world application of grammar. While active engagement through inductive methods like games and role-playing fosters critical thinking and deeper understanding by allowing students to unravel concepts themselves with the teacher as a facilitator, a blend of both approaches is often most effective for comprehensive learning, as stressed by Varsat (2023).

Theme 4: Interaction and Engagement for Deeper Understanding

Interaction and engagement in learning go beyond passive reception, fostering deeper understanding through active participation, discussion, and collaboration. When students actively engage with the material and each other, they process information more thoroughly, connect it to existing knowledge, and build stronger neural pathways,

leading to improved retention and the ability to apply what they've learned, as emphasized by Seril (2025). Participant 4 mentioned that “Students often find interaction-based activities more engaging and motivating than traditional grammar exercises. The dynamic nature of group work, role-play, and discussions can break the monotony of rote learning, making grammar practice feel more relevant and enjoyable. Subsequently, participants 2 and 3 said that “students generally react well to interactive grammar activities, finding them engaging and motivating, which significantly boosts their grammar skills through authentic language use and peer feedback, leading to deeper understanding compared to passive methods. While some may initially find it challenging, especially with English, these activities effectively foster cooperation, collaboration, and new insights and ultimately enhance confidence and self-esteem.” Participant 5 also highlighted that “For some students, especially those who are less confident in their English abilities, the pressure of individual performance is lessened in group settings. They might feel more comfortable experimenting with language and taking risks when working with peers.”

Students often find interactive grammar activities more engaging and motivating than traditional exercises, as the dynamic nature of group work and role-play makes practice more relevant and enjoyable, ultimately boosting grammar skills through authentic use and peer feedback. This collaborative environment can also reduce pressure for less confident students, encouraging them to experiment with language and take risks in a supportive setting, as stressed by Du and Nguyen (2023).

Theme 5: Interplay of Knowledge and Confidence

Knowledge and confidence have a reciprocal relationship: strong knowledge builds confidence, while confidence encourages learning and risk-taking, as participant 3 brought out that “students are rich in ideas in mind but afraid to express them due to errors. Despite engaging in interactive discussions and activities, many students remain hesitant to share their ideas and speak up because they are worried about being judged or criticized for their English language skills.”

Despite having many ideas and participating in interactive activities, students often hesitate to express themselves due to fear of judgment or criticism regarding their English language skills (Pabro–Macquidato, 2021).

Emergent Theme 2: Multifaceted Nature of English Grammar Acquisition

English grammar acquisition is a complex process influenced by a student's first language (L1), the amount and quality of their exposure to English, and the teaching approaches employed.

Theme 2.1: How Experience and Deep Involvement Shape Us

Exposure and immersion are powerful forces in language acquisition, providing learners with extensive contact with the target language in meaningful contexts (Apoko & Waluyo, 2025). Consistent exposure to authentic language across sources such as conversations, media, and real-life situations fosters natural vocabulary acquisition, improves listening comprehension, and enhances understanding of cultural nuances. Participants 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, and 14 highlighted that “learning English can happen through various forms of exposure, such as the internet and childhood cartoons, where increased exposure leads to greater learning. Educational settings also contribute, and consistently hearing correct usage helps the brain develop an intuitive sense of what sounds right, fostering an awareness of real-life grammar. This constant immersion, including conversations with English speakers, watching movies, and reading, builds a foundational understanding of English, even without explicit knowledge of the rules.”

This highlights the significant role of passive and active exposure in English language acquisition. Learning can occur incidentally through enjoyable media like the internet and cartoons, demonstrating that consistent input, even without focused study, contributes to language development. Furthermore, formal education and active engagement through listening, speaking, and reading reinforce this learning, allowing the brain to internalize correct patterns and develop an intuitive grasp of English grammar and usage, often preceding the ability to articulate the underlying rules.

Theme 2.2: The Influence of the First Language L1

The influence of a student's first language (L1) significantly shapes their acquisition of English, acting as both a facilitator when L1 structures align with English and a source of interference when grammatical rules differ. This interplay of positive and negative transfer impacts various aspects of English learning, including grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, and understanding this influence is crucial for effective teaching strategies (Hussain, 2023).

“.....because English was not their first language (Bisaya), expressing thoughts initially posed a challenge, and their native language did not readily facilitate English grammar development.” This statement was brought out by participants 6, 7, and 8. However, participants 6 and 8 highlighted as well that “through consistent practice, vocabulary expansion, and attention to sentence structure, the initial difficulty in expressing thoughts due to English not being the first language gradually improved, leading to

increased confidence in both written and spoken communication, despite the occasional unconscious application of the native language rules, demonstrating a continuous learning process.”

Participants whose first language was not English initially found it challenging to express their thoughts, as the structure of their native language did not readily support English grammar acquisition. However, consistent effort through practice, vocabulary building, and focusing on English sentence structure led to gradual improvement and increased confidence in both speaking and writing, even with the occasional influence of their first language. This highlights the persistence of L1 influence alongside the positive impact of dedicated learning strategies.

Theme 2.3: Impact of Explicit Instruction and Learning Strategies

Explicit instruction, in which grammar rules are directly explained and modeled, provides learners with a foundational understanding. Complementing this, effective learning strategies, such as active engagement through games and real-world application, enhance retention and deeper comprehension, as explained by Varsat (2023).

“...actively engaging learning strategies, where teachers clearly explain the 'why' behind sentence structure using visuals and real-life examples, significantly improves understanding and retention for active learners. Interactive activities like games and group work make learning fun and less stressful, fostering deeper comprehension through practical application and peer feedback, ultimately making grammar lessons more meaningful and applicable to real communication,” said participants 6, 7, 11, 13, and 14.

Active learning strategies enhance understanding, retention, and practical application of English grammar. This approach is highly effective for active learners through clear explanations, visual aids, real-world examples, and interactive activities, making the process meaningful and enjoyable.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, effective English language learning is a multifaceted process that thrives on a balanced approach. Incidental learning through authentic exposure, like music, contributes significantly to an intuitive understanding of the language, particularly in vocabulary and real-world usage. However, the learner's first language plays a crucial role, acting as both a facilitator through positive transfer and a source of errors through negative transfer, necessitating teaching strategies that address these influences. A combination of explicit grammar instruction and implicit learning through engaging, interactive

activities appears to be the most successful pedagogical approach, catering to diverse learning styles and promoting deeper understanding and retention. Creating a supportive and collaborative learning environment is also vital, as it fosters confidence and encourages learners to actively participate and take risks without fear of judgment. Furthermore, consistent exposure and immersion in the target language provide essential real-world context, aiding natural acquisition. While the first language can present initial challenges, dedicated learning strategies focused on practice and sentence structure lead to gradual improvement. Ultimately, an integrated approach that blends explicit teaching with opportunities for implicit learning within an encouraging and immersive environment is paramount for successful English language acquisition.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

Curriculum Development: Develop a curriculum framework that acknowledges learners' first language. This could include identifying common areas of negative transfer for specific L1 groups and incorporating targeted activities and explanations to proactively address these challenges.

Teachers' Training: Equip educators with the essential skills to transform explicit language instruction into dynamic and engaging learning experiences.

Future Researchers: Undertake longitudinal studies to assess the sustained effects of combining explicit grammar instruction with interactive, implicit learning activities on learners' overall English proficiency and retention. This would provide valuable insights into the most effective long-term teaching strategies.

Differentiated English Learning Handout: The creation of a differentiated English learning handout with various English grammar inferences that the educator is intentionally designing instruction to address individual differences in student readiness and learning profiles, promoting more effective and personalized grammar acquisition.

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The Incredible Story of the Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained

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Abstract— John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* are among the most profound epic poems in the English literary canon. *Paradise Lost* recounts the dramatic and compelling story of humanity's fall from grace a narrative filled with rebellion, betrayal, and the battle between innocence and corruption. This epic depicts an intense struggle between God and Satan for control over humanity's fate, spanning the realms of Heaven, Hell, and Earth. Central to this conflict are Adam and Eve, whose susceptibility to temptation lies at the heart of mankind's downfall, orchestrated by Satan and his band of rebel angels. Published in 1667, *Paradise Lost* vividly portrays Satan's defiance, his expulsion from Heaven, and his cunning role in leading Adam and Eve into sin, thereby causing their exile from Eden. Its sequel, *Paradise Regained* (1671), shifts focus to Christ's unwavering resolve during Satan's efforts to tempt Him in the wilderness. Where the former epic depicts humanity's fall through disobedience, the latter celebrates redemption by highlighting Christ's triumphant resistance. Together, the two works present a striking contrast while *Paradise Lost* illustrates the origin of sin; *Paradise Regained* reveals the victory over it through steadfast faith and moral fortitude in the face of temptations like lust, pride, and power. These epics aim to assert "Eternal Providence" and illuminate the divine purpose by justifying "the ways of God to men." In *Paradise Lost*, Milton narrates the descent of Satan and his followers into Hell's inferno, Satan's subsequent escape to Eden's untainted beauty, and his insidious manipulation of Eve, which ultimately leads to Adam's choice to share in her fate. Yet even amid humanity's tragic fall, there remains a promise of redemption. In *Paradise Regained*, Milton explores Satan's attempts to undermine Jesus' mission by tempting Him with worldly power, culminating in a greater triumph as Christ emerges victorious. Together, these epics celebrate the Son as a resplendent hero the ultimate conqueror over sin and death, who reconciles mankind with God. Read as a cohesive narrative, these masterpieces not only exalt the Son's glory but also provide profound reflections on faith, temptation, and salvation.



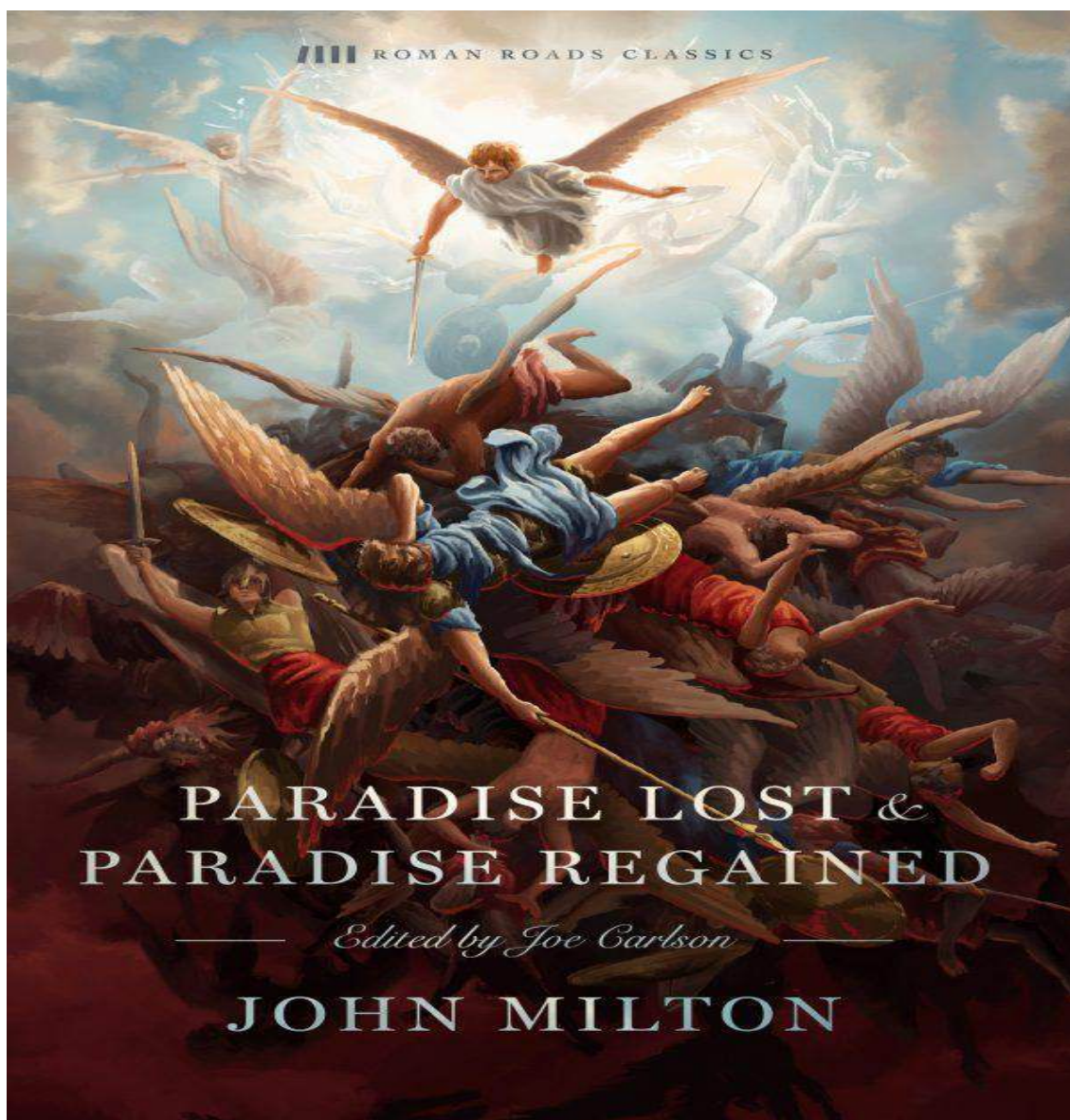
Keywords— betrayal, temptation, triumphant, wilderness, disobedience, illuminate, victorious, redemption, providence, salvation.

"Paradise was made for tender hearts; hell, for loveless hearts".

Voltaire

"Of Man's first disobedience, and the fruit Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste Brought death into the World, and all our woe, With loss of Eden, till one greater Man Restore us, and regain the blissful seat".

John Milton



In the early eighteenth century, John Milton emerged as a cornerstone of English classicism. Before the Restoration, however, he was primarily regarded as a polemicist rather than a poet. The elements that aligned his work with classical tradition its authoritative tone, unrhymed verse, and intricate poetic diction stood apart from the prevailing notions of classicism at the time.

Paradise Lost, Milton's renowned epic, was completed by 1665, first published in 1667, and later revised for a second edition in 1674. The original edition, published as a quarto, comprised ten books. In the second octavo edition, the number of books expanded to twelve by dividing Books VII and X into Books VII-VIII and XI-XII, respectively. Over nearly four centuries, Paradise Lost has wielded profound influence over English literary criticism and poetry, a legacy that remains vibrant to this day. Through both Paradise Lost and its companion piece,

Paradise Regained, readers are introduced to Milton's distinctive approach to poetic artistry. Both epics are written in blank verse unrhymed iambic pentameter a metrical form popularized by William Shakespeare and widely regarded as capturing the natural rhythms of English speech. This meter consists of ten-syllable lines with alternating unstressed and stressed syllables arranged in five pairs. While Paradise Lost chronicles the fall of Lucifer and the subsequent expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden, Paradise Regained shifts focus to the temptation of Christ, inspired by the Gospel of Luke.

Paradise Regained recounts Jesus' journey following his baptism by John the Baptist. During his forty-day fast in the desert, Satan tempts him repeatedly first targeting Jesus' physical hunger with food, then appealing to his pride, and finally tempting him with wealth and dominion over earthly kingdoms. These tests embody the

threefold temptations often described as lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Despite Satan's efforts to corrupt Jesus' body, heart, and mind, he steadfastly resists every temptation. Though both works are imbued with an epic character, *Paradise Regained* is markedly shorter than *Paradise Lost*, earning it the label of a "brief epic." Despite its conciseness, it incorporates many traditional elements of epic poetry: it begins in medias res, traverses vast symbolic terrain, and features divine interventions that shape human fate. It also utilizes familiar epic techniques such as epithets, extended speeches, and catalogues, while addressing universal themes through a central hero who embodies societal virtues.

Understanding the interplay between these two works is crucial to appreciating their individual significance. *Paradise Lost* employs an elevated style with elaborate poetic devices and an abundance of similes, reflecting its intricate exploration of humanity's fall from grace. In contrast, *Paradise Regained* adopts a simpler and more direct tone with fewer rhetorical flourishes, emphasizing moral and spiritual redemption as a counterbalance to the tragic themes of its predecessor. Together, these masterpieces form a rich dialogue of contrasts and reversals, showcasing Milton's profound literary achievements.

Literature Review: The scholarly discourse surrounding Milton's epics oscillates between interpreting them as expressions of poetic independence surpassing theological orthodoxy and viewing them as elaborate, imaginative interpretations of Scripture. Foundational analyses feature C.S. Lewis's argument that *Paradise Lost* exalts obedience within the framework of classical epic tradition; Stanley Fish's assertion that the poem implicates readers in Satan's persuasive rhetoric to educate them; Barbara K. Lewalski's exploration of Milton's Protestant poetics and biblical typology; John Carey's investigation of Milton's radicalism; and Alastair Fowler's editorial work on the sources and structures underlying the poems. Subsequent research has shifted focus to themes such as Eve's agency, the interplay of regicide and republican politics, and the reimagining of the epic form through the "brief epic," which emphasizes spiritual rather than martial triumph.

Methodology: This study employs close textual analysis and intersexual comparison, with primary texts including *Paradise Lost* (1674 edition containing twelve books), *Paradise Regained* (1671), and the Bible (King James Version). Occasional references to patristic and Reformation sources known to Milton are also incorporated. The analysis is structured around three key focal areas: (a) narrative parallels and divergences, (b) theological emphases such as free will, Christology, and

soteriology, and (c) poetic elements including meter, epic conventions, and rhetorical style. All citations adhere to APA 7th edition guidelines, with biblical references specified by book, chapter, and verse.

The central narrative of *Paradise Lost* recounts Satan's rebellion against God, his subsequent expulsion from Heaven alongside his fallen angels, and his temptation of Adam and Eve, leading to their fall from grace. Its companion piece, *Paradise Regained*, outlines Jesus' steadfast resistance to Satan's temptations in the wilderness, symbolizing humanity's spiritual triumph where Adam and Eve falter. *Paradise Lost* epitomizes the epic genre grand in scope, eloquent in language, emotionally resonant, and vividly descriptive, charting the fall of humanity from divine bliss to tragic loss. Milton's portrayal of Satan stands out as an extraordinarily nuanced character, among the most complex in literary history. As a fictional masterpiece, the work excels. Despite its epic form, Milton originally conceived his biblical narrative centered on Creation and the Fall as a tragedy. This intent is highlighted by Edward Phillips in his *Life* (1694), where he notes that certain lines from Book IV of *Paradise Lost* (ll.32–41) were initially penned years earlier as part of a planned dramatic tragedy.

During the eighteenth century, critical focus on *Paradise Lost* emphasized its theological underpinnings. The poem was revered as a cornerstone of orthodox Christian doctrine, attracting Anglicans, Dissenters, Roman Catholics, and Deists alike. In 1792, one critic asserted that *Paradise Lost* had done more to bolster orthodox belief "than all the books of divinity ever written." Eighteenth-century critics largely merged their admiration for Milton's artistic and theological merits without seeking to separate form from content. This approach shifted with Romantic-era critics who began examining Milton as a deliberate craftsman of language and narrative. While some critics such as Jeffrey, Gifford, Croker, and Lockhart offered limited commentary on Milton's artistry, figures like Coleridge, Hazlitt, and Keats drew attention to his technical excellence. It was within this period that Milton's literary identity underwent a transformation, with his characters Satan, Adam, Eve, and even his depiction of God becoming dynamic and multidimensional. The possibility of alternative outcomes to the plotline of *Paradise Lost* fascinated poets and novelists alike.

Satan emerged as an especially compelling figure during Romantic interpretations. Writers frequently grappled with his dual role as oppressor and tragic victim. Evil itself came to be viewed as a condition of profound psychological conflict whereby tyrants project their suffering outward to encompass others. *Paradise Lost* evolved into a rich psychological allegory reflecting

complex social, spiritual, and existential motivations that shape human identity and religious thought. The Milton of religious and political debate, and perhaps even of his personal life, is often marked by a lack of warmth and a sharpness in tone. In contrast, the Milton of poetry emerges as one of those rare, great figures known for their humility. To many, Milton was revered almost as a saint, with his poems cherished and preserved as if offering a glimpse into an eternal life. Elizabeth Barrett Browning expressed immense awe, feeling nearly overwhelmed to the point of wanting to "run her head against the wall" upon encountering the first edition of *Paradise Lost* adorned with Milton's signature and seal.

In *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* though more liberally in the latter, which shows his artistic progression Milton makes use of counterpoint throughout. However, in *Samson Agonists*, particularly within the choruses, the application of counterpoint is, in my view, entirely pervasive. Here, each line is constructed with two distinct yet coexisting rhythmic measures.

SECTION – I

Paradise Lost

Book I: The narrative delves into the Fall of Man, tracing the roots of humanity's disobedience toward God to Satan's relentless quest for vengeance following his banishment from Heaven. The story begins with Satan and his fallen angels lying in torment upon the fiery lake of Hell. Rising from this despair, Satan rallies his followers, organizes them into an army, and informs them of a newly created world hidden in the shadows of Chaos. He then convenes a council and constructs the grand Palace of Pandemonium as their base of operations. The poem opens with John Milton, the author, invoking the guidance of the Holy Spirit, referred to as the "Heavenly Muse," to inspire his work. He seeks to "assert Eternal Providence and justify the ways of God to men." After establishing this purpose, Milton embarks on the telling of his epic tale.

True to classical tradition, *Paradise Lost* begins in medias res plunging readers into the middle of the action. The opening unfolds with Satan and his defeated army of rebel angels lying unconscious in the searing expanse of Hell, overwhelmed by the divine might that cast them out of Heaven. Gradually regaining consciousness, Satan stirs his followers, and they mourn their downfall and the grim reality of their new existence. Refusing to submit, however, they resolve to make the best of their internal exile. As Satan proclaims, "The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven." Milton proceeds to name several prominent rebels: Moloch, Astarte, Thammuz, Baal, Osiris, Isis, and others. These identities are

deliberate; Milton aligns these figures with humanity's historical gods, portraying them as devils deceiving humankind. Rallying his enormous legions with a rousing speech, Satan commands the rapid construction of a massive palace, Pandemonium, where they gather to plot their next moves. This initial section also offers Milton's interpretation of divine providence. He asserts that God permitted Satan's rebellion to unfold, explaining that otherwise, Satan would have been unable to rise again from his defeat upon the burning lake.

*"...but that the will And high permission of all-ruling
Heaven Left him at large to his own dark designs, That
with reiterated crimes he might Heap on himself
damnation, while he sought Evil to others, and enraged
might see How all his malice served but to bring forth
Infinite goodness, grace, and mercy, shewn On Man by
him seduced, but on himself
Treble confusion, wrath, and vengeance poured."*

The explanation offered for the existence of evil remains deeply unsatisfactory. Firstly, in the Christian framework, Satan was already condemned to Hell there exists no greater punishment within this system. Allowing him the freedom to continue his malevolent deeds does nothing to intensify his suffering. Secondly, if this was part of God's divine plan, then by Christianity's own account, it failed catastrophically. Rather than merely serving as a means to display goodness and mercy, Satan's actions produced vast and unfathomable suffering across the world, leading to countless innocents perishing and, ultimately, the majority of humanity being condemned to Hell for eternity. If Satan was already doomed, what purpose does it serve to permit him to drag so many others into damnation alongside him?

Book II: Within Hell, Satan and his followers deliberate whether to resume their rebellion against Heaven. A council in Pandemonium concludes that repentance is not an option, and therefore their struggle must continue. Various schemes are proposed but discarded, until Satan himself suggests targeting Earth, the newly created realm prophesied in Heaven. By either corrupting or destroying humanity, they might strike a meaningful blow against God. Though the hazardous nature of the mission causes hesitation among his allies, Satan, as their leader, volunteers for the task, earning widespread admiration from his cohorts.

Satan ventures to the fortified gates of Hell, guarded by Sin a grotesque half-woman, half-serpent who perpetually births hellhounds that tear her apart and Death, a formidable shadow carrying a spear. When confronted by Death and ordered to return to punishment, Satan boldly rejects the command. Before violence ensues, Sin intervenes and reveals her identity as Satan's daughter, born

of his rebellion, with Death as her offspring. Both were cast out along with the rebel angels, and though God instructed her to guard Hell's gates, Sin feels no loyalty toward him. She pledges allegiance instead to Satan, who promises rewards if she opens the way to Earth. She complies, unlocking the gates and granting access to Chaos beyond. Navigating the chaotic void, Satan eventually glimpses Heaven's radiant walls and Earth suspended below, connected by a golden chain. Fuelled by vengeance and malice, he flies toward his target.

This sequence exacerbates the inadequacies of the theological justification for evil. As highlighted elsewhere, if God intended Hell as eternal punishment for the rebel angels, why was no measure taken to ensure they remained confined? Making Sin the offspring of rebellion a gatekeeper effectively allowed the prisoners to operate at will outside their prescribed torment. Even more perplexing is that after Satan's departure from Hell, Sin and Death follow and establish a pathway through Chaos that permanently connects Hell to the Earth. This "bridge" facilitates easy transit between realms for the purpose of corrupting and punishing mortals "except whom God and good Angels guard by special grace." The troubling implication is that this deity actively enabled such an outcome. If God could easily have secured Hell and prevented such chaos but chose not to, how can this being be called good? Rather than thwarting Satan's schemes or preventing harm outright, this theology suggests that God not only permitted evil but ensured its efficient proliferation.

Christians may point to "special grace" as evidence of divine goodness arguing that some individuals are protected from harm but this raises further contradictions. If grace cannot be earned and is entirely at God's discretion, why is such protection limited? Shouldn't omnipotent goodness demand universal safeguarding from atrocities it unleashed or enabled? Praising a selective grace seems as illogical as commending a law enforcement officer who deliberately releases dangerous criminals yet decides to shield a chosen few from their rampage. If such selective intervention is considered praiseworthy, it ignores the underlying culpability for creating the situation in the first place.

Book III: God observes Satan's journey and predicts the forthcoming Fall of Man, foreseeing humanity's succumbing to temptation and the consequent divine punishment. He acknowledges the Son of God's self-offering as a ransom for humanity, setting the incarnation in motion for a future time. Meanwhile, Satan reaches the universe's edge, navigating through the Limbo of Vanity and arriving at Heaven's Gate. Here, he disguises himself to

deceive Uriel, Guardian of the Sun, and gains knowledge about Earth and humanity.

At this point in Milton's narrative, the logical inconsistencies in his theological defence become evident. The chapter opens within Heaven, where God observes Satan's approach to Earth and attempts to rationalize why humanity's fall which He knows will happen and does nothing to prevent is not ultimately His responsibility. God even absolves Himself of responsibility for Satan's escape from Hell, claiming, "whom no bounds; Prescribed, no bars of Hell, nor all the chains; Heaped on him there, nor yet the main Abyss; Wide interrupt, can hold." However, Satan's escape was only possible because God allowed it. Similarly, God foretells humanity's fall and attributes their failure to their own choices, declaring that Adam and Eve had enough strength to resist but chose to give in: "Whose fault?; Whose but his own? Ingrate, he had of me; All he could have; I made him just and right, Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall." This reasoning falters under scrutiny. For an omniscient deity, suggesting that Adam and Eve "could have" acted differently is paradoxical a being with perfect foresight would know their eventual choice and must have created circumstances ensuring such an outcome. To argue that they possessed sufficient traits to resist temptation contradicts the reality of their failure. Similar to a collapsing bridge deemed "strong enough" to withstand wind but nonetheless failing in a storm, it makes no sense to claim resistance when failure has already occurred. The event itself negates the supposed adequacy of resistance.

God further argues that free will underpins the fall of humanity and the rebellious angels. He asserts that creating beings with predetermined obedience would render their love and loyalty meaningless: "Not free, what proof could they have given sincere; Of true allegiance, constant faith, or love, Where only what they needs must do appeared, Not what they would? What praise could they receive, What pleasure I, from such obedience paid." Yet this justification struggles under its own weight. If God is omnipotent, there is no reason why He couldn't have created beings who possessed free will yet consistently chose good without rebellion an ideal state Milton himself envisions for Heaven. Even Jesus, as a human with free will during His time on Earth, chose not to sin. What higher attributes did He possess that humanity lacks? Milton also omits numerous biblical references that emphasize salvation through predestination rather than free will.

In response to this reasoning, God the Son the second person of the Trinity objects to humanity being abandoned due to their inevitable failure: "That far be from thee, Father, who art judge; Of all things made, and judges only right!" God reassures Him that salvation will be

available to those who seek it, framing dependence on Him as essential: "...that he may know how frail; His fallen condition is, and to me owe; All his deliverance, and to none but me." Yet in a seemingly contradictory statement, God further explains that He has selected specific individuals for salvation by grace alone: "Some I have chosen of peculiar grace, Elect above the rest; so is my will." Despite this apparent inconsistency regarding free will and predestination, God declares that humanity's sin justly warrants death as punishment. The Son volunteers to pay the penalty on behalf of humankind. This act elicits widespread praise from the heavenly choir. Importantly, God distinguishes human sin from angelic rebellion; while man yielded to temptation and can be redeemed, Satan and his followers fell entirely by choice and will receive no mercy.

Meanwhile, Satan's journey continues as he nears Earth. He traverses a realm dubbed the Limbo of Vanity a sphere near the Moon inhabited by those committed to empty pursuits. This realm acts surprisingly as neither Heaven nor Hell. Milton even speculates that saints or spirits may dwell on the Moon itself: "Translated Saints, or middle Spirits...Betwixt the angelical and human kind." Using this otherworldly plane as a platform for critique, Milton delivers a scathing commentary on the Catholic priesthood. Satan descends upon the Sun, which Milton envisioned as a world much like Earth, yet radiating with unparalleled brilliance, as one might imagine. There, he encounters Uriel, the Archangel who serves as the Sun's guardian. Disguising himself as a lesser angel, Satan feigns curiosity about God's newest creation and asks for guidance to observe the beings known as humans. Uriel obliges and points the way, leading Satan to journey down to Earth, where he ultimately lands atop Mt. Niphates a peak that later, in *Paradise Regained*, becomes the very mountain from which Satan shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world.

Book IV: Satan descends to Earth, discovering the Garden of Eden, where he observes Adam and Eve. Fixated on corrupting them, he decides to direct his efforts toward the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. During the night, Gabriel finds him near Eve's resting place, attempting to tempt her through a dream. He is promptly cast out. Later, perched on the summit of Mount Niphates, Satan grapples with deep internal conflict. He feels doubt about his purpose, despair over his fall from grace, and grief as he comes to terms with the magnitude of his loss and the inevitability of his eternal suffering. Milton emphasizes an important concept here: Hell is not merely a physical location but something Satan now carries within himself a torment inseparable from his being. While this internalized suffering could suggest a reason why God allowed him to

escape Hell for his own reckoning, it fails to justify why God permitted him to extend his destructive influence to others. Despite this fleeting introspection, Satan ultimately doubles down on his resolve and accepts his fate with chilling determination, proclaiming that all good is now lost to him and that evil will be his sole pursuit.

Making his way into the Garden of Eden a lush paradise of cedar, pine, fir, and palm trees enclosed by a tall wall Satan effortlessly scales the barrier, leading one to question its purpose as a form of protection. Once inside, he alights upon the Tree of Life, surveying the exquisite beauty of the garden and noticing its first inhabitants. Adam and Eve are described as majestic and godlike, yet from the outset, it is made abundantly clear that they are not equals. According to Milton's narrative, Eve is depicted as Adam's inferior, created for submission: "He for God only, she for God in him." This unmistakable bias forms a recurring theme throughout the work, underscoring a blatant thread of sexism. Eavesdropping on their conversation, Satan learns that although Adam and Eve seemingly live in perfect happiness, they are bound by one divine command to abstain from eating the fruit of a specific tree in Paradise. His reaction to this discovery is particularly noteworthy:

"From their own mouths; all is not theirs it seems: One fatal Tree there stands of Knowledge call'd, Forbidden them to taste: Knowledge forbidden? Suspicious, reasonless. Why should their Lord Envy them that? can it be sin to know, Can it be death? and do they only stand By Ignorance, is that their happy state, The proof of their obedience and their faith?"

O fair foundation laid whereon to build Their ruin! Hence I will excite their minds

With more desire to know, and to reject Envious commands, invented with design

To keep them low whom knowledge might exalt..."

This passage highlights the anti-intellectual tendencies embedded within the framework of Milton's interpretation of Christianity. The symbolism is clear: doubt, intellectual curiosity, and the pursuit of knowledge are embodied by a figure portrayed as the essence of evil. It suggests that what God values is ignorance and unquestioning submission. As a humanist, I find this perspective deeply troubling and wholly reject it. The pursuit of understanding and knowledge about the world is inherently virtuous, not malevolent. A faith that is genuine will endure scrutiny and critical thought; only those advocating for a flawed or deceptive belief system would fear inquiry. It is the champions of lies and manipulation who promote passive compliance while threatening dissenters with eternal damnation if they refuse to accept doctrine without question. This kind of anti-intellectualism

has been a catalyst for immense suffering and wrongdoing throughout history. Ironically, it is Satan's argument that appears more rational, though Milton cunningly attempts to dissuade readers from acknowledging its validity. Instead, he pre-emptively biases audiences against Satan by portraying him as unequivocally evil, rendering his words unacceptable regardless of their logic or coherence.

As the story continues, Uriel, realizing he has been deceived, hurriedly informs Gabriel, another archangel, to remain vigilant against malevolent intrusions. In Paradise, evening falls as Adam and Eve conclude their labor in the garden. In a scene laden with overtly patriarchal overtones, Eve defers to Adam with unsettling submission: "My Author and Disposer, what thou bidst; Unargu'd I obey; so God ordains, God is thy Law, thou mine: to know no more; Is woman's happiest knowledge and her praise." After praying together, the pair withdraws to their bower for rest. Shortly thereafter, a group of angels on patrol discovers Satan in Paradise, transformed into the shape of a toad. They find him whispering into Eve's ear and apprehend him, presenting him to Gabriel. Despite his capture, Satan remains unyielding and even defiant, remarking with pointed irony that God should "surer bar; His Iron Gates" if He hopes to contain them in their prison of darkness. The encounter teeters on the brink of violence, but divine decree forbids such conflict in Paradise, forcing Satan to retreat once again.

Book V: Eve awakens, unsettled by a troubling dream, and finds solace in Adam's comforting presence. Her dream, the first of its kind, was filled with strange and disconcerting imagery about consuming the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge. Despite her unease, they come together to sing their morning hymn of praise to God. However, one might question the sincerity of their devotion, considering their plea for divine provision of only "good" seems to have been left unanswered.

Meanwhile, in Heaven, God observes the unfolding events with concern. He wishes to avoid appearing culpable if Satan succeeds in tempting humankind. To this end, God sends the angel Raphael to warn Adam and Eve about their adversary and to reiterate the importance of obedience. Raphael dutifully descends to Earth without hesitation a descent described in a passage that reflects the era in which Milton wrote. Here, the angel's extraordinary eyesight is contrasted with Galileo's telescope, which "observes imagined lands and regions in the Moon" with less certainty than Raphael's divine clarity. Upon reaching Eden, Raphael is warmly welcomed by Adam and Eve. Taking a seat among them, he begins to recount the events that led to Satan's fall from grace. According to Raphael's story, Satan had once been among

Heaven's most powerful angels but was consumed by jealousy when God appointed His Son as regent and commanded all angels to bow before Him. Refusing to submit, Satan rallied a third of the heavenly host with a fiery speech urging them to "cast off this yoke" and join his rebellion. However, one angel, the seraph Abdiel, rejected the treachery and returned to God's side a decisive act of loyalty that closes this part of Raphael's tale.

One notable aspect of Raphael's discourse is his insistence on the value of voluntary devotion, asserting that God accepts only service freely given. He states that coerced hearts cannot truly prove their willingness to serve, as obedience born of necessity or destiny undermines genuine choice. This assertion invites questions, however. If true voluntary service is paramount, why does God demand unwavering obedience under the looming threat of eternal damnation? Isn't such servitude essentially coerced? Moreover, as an omnipotent creator, did God not foresee and ultimately intend how men and angels would behave? These philosophical dilemmas echo broader questions raised in discussions like "Divine Blackmail," which critiques the seeming paradox between free will and divine omniscience intertwined with punishment.

Book VI: Raphael carries on with his narration, detailing the celestial war and the eventual defeat of Satan and his followers. The segment where the Son launches his decisive assault on the rebels forms both the literal and thematic crux of the poem, as humanity's impending downfall becomes an indirect consequence of these events. The story delves into the aftermath of Satan's rebellion. In response, God commands His armies to confront the insurgent angels, and the two factions engage in a fierce battle. Angels, it turns out, can sustain injuries much like humans, though their wounds heal almost instantaneously due to their ethereal nature. Strengthened by God's will, the loyal angels dominate on the first day, easily overpowering and driving back their foes.

As night descends, Satan regroups his forces and devises a fresh strategy. Under his guidance, they labour through the night, extracting minerals and ore from Heaven's soil to craft new weapons. With dawn comes the unveiling of this sinister innovation: cannon batteries that catch the loyal angels off guard, inflicting devastating damage with fiery barrages. But their momentary triumph is short-lived. The loyal angels recover swiftly, retaliating by uprooting entire mountains and hurling them down upon the rebels, crushing them along with their weapons. Day two ends as another victory for God's army. By the third day, God decides there is no merit in allowing the conflict to continue endlessly. (One might wonder why this conclusion wasn't reached sooner.) He commissions His

Son to end the battle single-handedly. The Son enters the fray with unmatched might, utterly obliterates the rebel forces, and casts them down from Heaven into a deep abyss. Concluding his account, Raphael warns Adam that this very same Satan now roams within Paradise. He cautions Adam against placing trust in anything Satan might say, offering a final note of forewarning as humanity's trial begins.

Book VII: The Archangel conveys to Adam that, following Satan's defeat, God chose to initiate the creation of a new world where humanity could aspire to Heaven. To accomplish this, He sent His Son to complete the task over the course of six days. Eager to deepen his understanding, Adam asks Raphael to share the story of creation so he might praise God through this knowledge. Raphael agrees, but with caution, advising Adam that seeking too much knowledge can lead to harm. Knowledge, he explains, is like food it requires moderation, for indulging beyond limits can overwhelm the mind and turn wisdom into folly. The angel then recounts how, after Satan's fall, God resolved to compensate for the loss of numbers by creating a new world and a new race. Curiously, instead of forming them in Heaven directly, God decided they would begin outside Heaven and work their way upward through obedience and merit. In doing so, the eventual union of Earth and Heaven would create a harmonious, everlasting Kingdom of joy. However, the narrative sidesteps any mention of the inevitable reality that many from this new race would be lost and condemned.

The Son, acting as the agent of creation, ventures into Chaos to execute His task. Milton then weaves his interpretation of the biblical Genesis story, particularly aiming to reconcile the two accounts found in Genesis 1 and 2. His retelling aligns more closely with Genesis 1, depicting plants being created on the third day, birds and sea creatures on the fifth, and humanity on the sixth. This contrasts with Genesis 2, where man's creation precedes that of other living things.

Book VIII: Adam, seeking understanding of the heavens, is guided by Raphael to first focus on the knowledge of his immediate world. When Adam shifts the conversation to Eve and the deep passion she ignites in him, the Archangel cautions him to balance his earthly love with his higher spiritual inclinations, warning against letting his devotion to Eve cloud his judgment. Following this exchange, Raphael prepares to leave.

Still eager for enlightenment and wishing to extend the angel's company, Adam poses a cosmic question: why would God create countless stars in an immense universe seemingly to revolve around the Earth, a small and seemingly insignificant place? Raphael promptly advises against such inquiries, explaining that God's purposes in

creating the vast cosmos are beyond human comprehension. He suggests that rather than unraveling divine mysteries, humans should marvel at God's creativity and maintain their faith. Knowledge of whether Earth is stationary or moving, he adds, holds no relevance to human life. Raphael further muses that perhaps the magnitude of creation serves either to humble human attempts at understanding or to emphasize God's grandeur and humanity's relative insignificance. Nonetheless, he concludes, such matters should not preoccupy mortal minds. Instead, he urges Adam to embrace humility, remain focused on what pertains to his existence, and avoid overreaching into the unknown. In his advice, Raphael says, "Be lowly wise; think only what concerns thee and thy being; dream not to other worlds, what creatures there live, in what state, condition, or degree; contented that thus far hath been revealed."

Accepting Raphael's counsel, Adam shifts the subject, offering to share the story of his own beginning. With Raphael's encouragement, Adam recounts the day of his creation. He recalls awakening in Eden with an awareness of himself but no understanding of how he came to exist. Exploring the lush surroundings of the garden, he soon encounters God, who reveals Himself as the Creator of everything. God brings forth the animals for Adam to name them and grants him the Garden of Eden, with one condition that he must not eat from the tree of knowledge. Overwhelmed by solitude among the creatures, Adam confesses his need for companionship. Responding to this longing, God causes Adam to fall into a deep sleep and creates Eve from one of his ribs. Upon seeing Eve for the first time, Adam is immediately captivated by her beauty and perfection. He acknowledges her as his companion but notes her apparent inferiority in certain faculties and resemblance to God's image compared to his own. Despite this hierarchical observation, his love for her is profound. However, Raphael reminds Adam of his role as leader in their relationship, advising him not to allow Eve's physical allure to cloud his judgment or lead him astray from God's commandments. After reiterating his warning for Adam to remain obedient to their Creator, Raphael departs.

Book IX: Satan stealthily returns to Eden under the cover of night, taking on the form of a mist before inhabiting a sleeping serpent. As the new day unfolds, he finds Eve alone and begins to lavish praise upon her beauty. He deceives her by claiming that his ability to speak came from consuming fruit from the forbidden Tree of Knowledge. Gradually, his words erode her resolve, leading her to take a bite of the fruit. Having accomplished his goal, Satan departs from the Garden. Eve, now altered in awareness, carries the forbidden fruit to Adam. Realizing what has transpired, Adam instantly perceives her fall from grace. Unable to part from her even in transgression, he consumes the fruit as

well, resulting in the loss of their innocence. With this act marking humanity's irrevocable downfall, Milton delves deeper into the consequences of their choices. Paradise is plunged into night once again, and Satan enters through the underground waters of the Tigris River. The waters emerge as a fountain at the Tree of Life's base, and Satan rises in mist-like form from within. He prowls Eden searching for an animal to disguise himself, ultimately choosing the serpent's sleeping body. It is noteworthy that in the Genesis narrative itself, the serpent is not attributed to Satan's possession nor framed as a demonic entity. The text simply portrays the serpent as one of God's creations, albeit the subtlest of all. Milton's interpretation introduces Satan as the orchestrator behind this deception.

As dawn touches Eden, Eve voices an unusual request she wishes to work apart from Adam during their daily gardening duties. Worried about distractions hindering their productivity if they work side by side, she proposes separating their tasks. Adam hesitates and reminds her of Raphael's warning about Satan prowling Paradise, intent on causing their ruin. He insists they would be stronger in resisting such an adversary if they stayed united rather than alone. Eve counters that Satan holds no physical power to harm them; he can only mislead their minds. She laments Adam's apparent lack of trust in her ability to withstand temptation and defends her stance with poignant logic. Her argument emphasizes that if God's creation, Eden, requires them to remain perpetually vigilant against harm, then the perfection and joy promised by their sanctuary would be undermined: "How are we happy, still in fear of harm?" Eve also expresses her unwavering faith in God's wise design, dismissing the idea that Paradise could be flawed or unsafe whether alone or together. Despite his lingering doubts and belief that Satan might deceive one of them individually, Adam eventually yields, allowing Eve to go off on her own.

Meanwhile, Satan slithers through Eden in serpent form, eagerly hoping to find Eve alone believing her easier to manipulate than Adam. His wish is granted; he discovers her unaccompanied and approaches with calculated charm. He greets her with reverence while praising her beauty and grace. Eve marvels at the serpent's ability to speak and asks how such a thing could be possible. Satan slyly responds that he gained speech and reason by eating a fruit from a wondrous tree. Intrigued by this miraculous transformation, Eve desires to see this remarkable source for herself. Without hesitation, Satan leads her directly to the forbidden Tree of Knowledge. Upon seeing it, Eve immediately recognizes its significance it is the one tree God explicitly forbade them from eating under penalty of death. Seizing

the moment, Satan delivers a persuasive and eloquent argument aimed at disarming Eve's fears and challenging God's prohibition. He claims that consuming the fruit brought him greater vitality and intelligence rather than harm or punishment. Furthermore, he refutes the notion that eating from the tree is inherently sinful or offensive to God. Instead, Satan suggests that God's ban stems from selfish motives wanting to prevent humankind from rising above ignorance and attaining divinity itself. He plants doubt in Eve's mind with questions about envy and divine intention: "Or is it envy? and can envy dwell; In Heavenly breasts?" According to his reasoning, God's true purpose is to keep them subservient rather than allow them to reach their full potential as beings possessing divine wisdom.

Eve is captivated by Satan's words and finds herself convinced that God's command must be baseless and unjustifiable: "In plain, then, what forbids him but to know?; For bids us good, forbids us to be wise!" Believing wholeheartedly that eating the fruit will elevate her rather than condemn her and trusting the serpent's apparent testimony that he ate without consequence Eve succumbs to temptation. She picks a fruit from the forbidden tree and eats, crossing a boundary that cannot be undone. Overcome by newfound knowledge, Eve exalts the tree for opening her eyes. For the first time, she becomes conscious of her previous subjugation and questions, "For, if inferior, who is truly free?" She begins to ponder Adam's possible reaction and debates whether to reveal the transformation she has experienced. Eventually, she returns to him and recounts the events, extolling the virtues of the tree and urging him to partake. Adam, though horrified by her deed, is unable to abandon her to face the consequences alone. His love for her compels him to act, as he declares, "The bond of nature pulls me: flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone you are, and from your fate I will never part, whether in bliss or woe." Trusting the serpent's claim and hoping that God would not destroy humanity for a single act of defiance, Adam eats as well. Overwhelmed with passion and desire, the two come together intimately before falling asleep.

Upon waking, however, their exhilaration is replaced by shame and fear as they fully grasp the gravity of their actions. Overcome with embarrassment, they hastily fashion coverings from leaves to hide their bodies. Confronting each other in this altered state stirs up an outpouring of guilt and anger. Adam denounces Eve for disobeying him and straying from his side; Eve retorts that she had no reason to doubt the serpent's words and insists that Adam would have succumbed just as easily had he been in her place. Shifting blame, she accuses Adam of failing to forbid her from venturing off alone. Adam counters vehemently, reminding her of his repeated warnings and asserting that her actions are the root cause of their downfall

his only fault being his misplaced trust in her.

Book X: The Son descends to Eden to deliver judgment upon Adam and Eve. Before departing, he clothes them, moved by pity for the shame they feel in their nakedness. Meanwhile, Satan returns triumphantly to Hell, unknowingly creating an open pathway for Sin and Death to enter the human world. Adam and Eve, filled with remorse, approach the Son to seek understanding and plead for mercy concerning the doom pronounced on their descendants. With the fall of humanity sealed, the angelic guards of Paradise sorrowfully ascend back to Heaven. God absolves them of blame, acknowledging that the events were beyond their power to prevent. This raises a puzzling question: Why establish a defence that was destined to fail? Nonetheless, God sends the Son to Earth to confront Adam and Eve. Upon his arrival in Eden, the guilty pair initially hide but are brought forth at his command to account for their actions. Adam admits his fault but shifts some blame to Eve, stating that he could suspect no harm from her hand. The Son reprimands him for obeying her, asserting that her role was to follow him and not the reverse, reinforcing the view that Adam's "perfection far excelled hers in all real dignity." When questioned, Eve confesses that she was deceived by the serpent. Strangely, God opts to direct punishment at the serpent itself.

Milton clarifies this by suggesting the serpent, being an animal without speech, cannot explain Satan's possession of its form. However, one might wonder why an omniscient deity would punish a creature incapable of defending itself. Oddly, this seems inconsistent with God's earlier remark that conviction did not belong to the serpent. Nevertheless, the serpent is cursed to slither on its belly and eat dust. Following the Genesis narrative, Eve is cursed with suffering in childbirth, Adam is condemned to toilsome labour, and both are sentenced to eventual death. The Son then clothes them in animal skins before returning to Heaven. Elsewhere, Sin and Death sense a change and traverse their newly opened path from Hell to Earth, bringing corruption everywhere they go. Meanwhile, Satan returns to Hell's Pandemonium fortress to announce his apparent victory. Yet his anticipated celebration turns into humiliation as all present are transformed into serpents. An illusory tree of knowledge appears before them, and in a cruel twist, its fruit disintegrates into ashes as they try to consume it. Milton notes that this punishment recurs annually, a reminder of their rebellion.

Sin and Death unleash their influence upon the Earth with devastating effects. Why the entirety of creation must suffer for the transgression of one human pair is left unexplained. God observes the destruction they cause but inexplicably chooses not to intervene; instead, he furthers it

by commanding his angels to alter the natural world. They introduce natural disasters scorching heat, bitter cold, storms, disease-ridden swamps and even tilt the Earth's axis to end its perpetual spring, initiating seasons. The harmonious balance among animals is shattered; they begin preying on one another in endless cycles of violence.

Witnessing these changes, Adam grieves deeply over humanity's fate and questions God's justice: Why must all humanity bear guilt for the sin of one individual? Neither God nor Milton provides a definitive answer. Overwhelmed by despair, Adam wishes for death to end his suffering. When Eve approaches him later in the night, he initially casts her off in anger, holding her responsible for his misery. She collapses at his feet in tears, expressing her desire to endure all punishment herself if it would spare him. Her profound anguish softens Adam's heart, and he forgives her. Eve proposes that they abstain from having children to spare future generations from suffering. Yet Adam argues that such an act would surely provoke greater wrath from God. Resigned to their fate, they agree not to defy divine will, even if it means perpetuating humanity's suffering. United in their pain and newfound acceptance, they return together to the spot where they were first judged by God, bowing in humble supplication as they seek forgiveness.

Book XI: The Son mediates with the Father on behalf of humanity, yet God decides that Adam and Eve must be banished from Paradise. Michael descends to the Garden and informs them that they will be sent out into the world. To prepare Adam, he shows him a vision from the summit of a hill, revealing the destiny of humanity up to the time of the Flood. In Heaven, God listens to Adam and Eve's prayers, which are said to please Him more than all the bounty of Paradise itself. This suggests, perhaps, that contrition following sin holds greater value to Him than unerring righteousness. Nonetheless, God rules that they can no longer remain in Paradise. He resolves to expel them and their offspring, though they have done nothing wrong for fear that they might eat from the Tree of Life and invalidate the mortality He decreed as punishment. To carry out this command, He dispatches angels led by the archangel Michael.

On Earth, Adam begins to witness the consequences of his defiance: he sees predatory animals like eagles attacking smaller birds and lions pursuing prey. However, there is little explanation as to why his sin catalyzed such changes in nature. Soon after, Michael and the other angels appear. Despite deep sorrow, both Adam and Eve accept their fate. Adam laments that he will not have the chance to show his descendants the sacred places in Eden where God once revealed Himself to him but this raises the question of why their children must suffer for their

parents' failings. Before their departure, Eve is gently placed into a deep sleep while Michael leads Adam to the tallest hill in Paradise. From this vantage point, Adam is shown visions of future hardships that result from their transgression. He witnesses Cain murdering Abel and death brought about by disease and affliction, showcasing the many cruel ways human life will come to an end. Moving forward in time, Michael reveals several key events from the Old Testament, including Enoch's ascension into Heaven and Noah's flood that punishes a world overwhelmed by sin.

Book XII: Michael continues his account, recounting Abraham's story and the promise of the Messiah through the intercession of the Son. Adam finds solace in these revelations; he then wakes the sleeping Eve, and Michael guides them out of the Garden. Michael goes on to reveal to Adam a sequence of future events: pivotal moments in biblical history, including the Old Testament narrative, the birth, life, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus, and the foundation of the Christian church. Once again, Milton critiques Catholicism by having Michael prophesy the eventual corruption of Christianity under their influence, until the day Jesus returns in a fiery purge to cleanse and renew the sinful Earth as Paradise. (It raises the question: if God had simply prevented Satan from entering Eden initially, all this intricate sequence of events might have been unnecessary. Why not preserve Paradise from the start?) The vision concludes, and Adam acknowledges his error in acting on his own judgment, resolving instead to follow divine will "henceforth I learn that to obey is best." He awakens Eve, and together they leave Paradise. Behind them, the angel's flaming sword seals off the gates, and they step into the wider, unknown world.

The poem's greatness lies not only in its remarkable scope and sustained intensity but also in its evocative and vivid imagery. Adam and Eve are universal archetypes, characters through whom readers can see reflections of themselves. Despite the intricate web of influences surrounding their pivotal sin, their fundamental human qualities remain strikingly clear. Meanwhile, Satan stands out as a vivid personification of cunning malevolence a dramatic figure who feels unsettlingly tangible. Criticisms have been levelled at Milton for overlooking contemporary advancements in science and philosophy for instance, the ambiguous depictions of astronomy in Book VIII but the poem operates within the framework of myth. Its power stems from its faithfulness to the structure of Christian belief rather than to historical or empirical precision. Ultimately, *Paradise Lost* is an extraordinary achievement. It combines intellectual richness with immense poetic depth, all executed with a command of classical traditions that make it unparalleled in

its scope and impact.

SECTION – II

Paradise Regained

Paradise Regained, an epic poem by John Milton, was first published in 1671 alongside his closet drama, *Samson Agonistes*. This work serves as a thematic continuation of his earlier and more renowned poem, *Paradise Lost*. Both poems share theological underpinnings, with *Paradise Regained* using blank verse and progressing through Christian history, much like its predecessor. However, this piece narrows its focus on the temptation of Christ, as outlined in the Gospel of Luke.

Book I: The narrative opens with Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist. Witnessing this, Satan conspires with his demons to plot against Jesus. Meanwhile, in Heaven, God speaks to the angels about Satan's arrogance, receiving their praises in response. Following the baptism, Jesus spends forty days fasting in the wilderness. During this time, Satan tries to tempt him with the prospect of bread but is met with steadfast resistance. Jesus allows the devil to remain nearby, albeit under strict limitations, while keeping his guard up as night approaches.

Milton begins the poem by reflecting on the story of humanity's Fall and then presents his purpose: recounting Jesus' ordeal during his wilderness temptation. After being baptised by John, Jesus feels compelled by the Holy Spirit to journey into the desert. Through a brief recollection of his life thus far, he embarks on a forty-day fast where he surprisingly neither eats nor feels hunger. Near the end of this period, Jesus encounters an elderly man gathering sticks, who questions his presence in such a desolate place. In response, Jesus expresses faith that the one who led him there will guide him out as well. Soon, the old man suggests that if Jesus is indeed the Son of God, he should transform stones into bread for nourishment. Recognizing Satan behind the disguise, Jesus confronts him. Exposing his identity, Satan remarks that humanity views him as their adversary despite having suffered no actual harm from him. He bitterly acknowledges that humans will ultimately be saved, while he remains condemned.

In response, Jesus rebukes Satan, asserting that his fall was deserved and that his fleeting access to Heaven only serves to highlight what he has permanently lost. Reflecting on Job's steadfastness during trials induced by Satan's interference, Jesus maintains that divine patience triumphed over temptation. Furthermore, he accuses Satan of deceiving people with false prophecies and declares that the age of oracles has ended. He emphasizes God's intent sending a living embodiment of divine truth to impart

wisdom and establish guidance through the Spirit dwelling within pious hearts. The dialogue within Paradise Regained reinforces some of Milton's recurring themes from Paradise Lost. It critiques intellectual pursuits beyond spiritual matters, suggesting mankind's knowledge should primarily serve their devotion to God while leaving other truths unexamined.

Book II: Simon the Zealot and Andrew the Apostle witness Jesus' baptism and recognize Him as the Messiah. However, they soon lose sight of Him, sparking a frantic search. Sharing their concern, Mother Mary recalls a moment from Jesus' childhood when she, too, lost Him at the age of twelve. Meanwhile, in the spiritual realm, Satan informs his demons about the impending challenge of tempting Jesus. He dismisses Belial's suggestion of using a honey trap, arguing that pride is a much more effective tool than seduction.

Jesus dreams of Elijah being fed by ravens before facing Satan's temptations in the wilderness. Satan first presents an opulent banquet, which Jesus resolutely rejects. When tempted with wealth and promises of power, Jesus counters by recounting the stories of King David's humble beginnings and his trust in God over material gains. Returning to his assembly of fallen angels, Satan acknowledges how much harder Jesus will be to deceive compared to Adam. Belial proposes using women to tempt Him, as was done with Solomon, but Satan dismisses this plan. He asserts that such tactics only work on weaker minds, suggesting that more potent enticements like promises of glory and fame must be used for someone like Jesus.

After forty days of fasting in the desert, Jesus begins to feel the strain of hunger but remains resolute in His obedience to God. One evening, He awakens to find Satan, now disguised as a man arrayed in rich garments. With a gesture, Satan conjures a table overflowing with every kind of food and tempts Jesus to satisfy His hunger, saying He has every right to partake of creation's abundance. Jesus calmly rebuffs him, explaining that if He chose, angels could provide for Him but He would not act outside God's will. The table vanishes. Satan then tempts Jesus with wealth and resources to build an army and secure power. But again, Jesus refuses, citing examples of historical and biblical figures who achieved greatness through humility and discipline. He concludes that true kingship lies in mastering one's own passions, not in ruling others.

Book III: Satan admires Christ's wisdom but mocks his lack of worldly accomplishments, drawing comparisons to the legendary feats of Alexander the Great by the age of thirty. Jesus, however, dismisses such notions, rejecting violence

and emphasizing that his path lies in suffering and sacrifice. Satan then attempts to tempt Christ by suggesting alliances and the liberation of the Ten Tribes, but Jesus remains steadfast, placing his trust in divine providence. Regrouping, Satan presents a new challenge: the allure of power. He questions why Jesus isolates himself in the wilderness while others, at even younger ages, have already achieved fame and influence over nations. Shouldn't crowds be heeding his teachings and seeking his wisdom? Jesus dismisses this suggestion with disdain, critiquing the nature of public admiration. Human approval, he argues, is shallow and meaningless. He poses, what satisfaction could possibly come from being celebrated by a "herd confused," a mass of people who praise without understanding or discernment? While this view paints a rather dim image of human nature, there is some truth to the observation that many are predisposed to follow rather than question or seek deeper knowledge a perspective that sheds light on the widespread adoption of Christianity throughout history.

Jesus further rejects the glorification of conquest and violence, asserting that those who pursue power through domination leave only destruction in their wake. He challenges the merit in celebrating acts that bring suffering to peaceful nations, robbing them of freedom and obliterating the fruits of peace. His assertion carries a profound moral truth that resonates even today. Yet it is worth noting the contradiction within the Bible itself, which frequently honours violent conquests, as seen in accounts like the Book of Joshua. In response to Jesus' statement against seeking glory, Satan counters with a compelling argument designed to provoke deeper reflection.

"Think not so slight of glory, therein least Resembling thy great Father. He seeks glory,

And for his glory all things made, all things Orders and governs; nor content in

Heaven, By all his Angels glorified, requires Glory from men, from all men,

good or bad, Wise or unwise, no difference, no exemption. Above all

sacrifice, or hallowed gift, Glory he requires, and glory he receives,

Promiscuous from all nations, Jew, or Greek, Or Barbarous,

nor exception hath declared; From us, his foes pronounced, glory he exacts."

This argument presents a significant critique, countering Jesus' response, which essentially asserts that while seeking glory is inappropriate for humans, it is justified for God because He is deemed deserving of it. However, this reasoning raises certain philosophical and

theological dilemmas. If Jesus is considered God, then shouldn't He, by the same logic, legitimately demand glory just as Satan provocatively suggested? While John Milton portrays Satan as rendered speechless by this reasoning, in reality, the argument appears flawed and open to challenge. This prompts further questions: What specific deeds make God deserving of glory in this theological context? Should glory be attributed to Him for allowing Satan to escape Hell and corrupt other souls? For permitting humanity to fall when such a catastrophe could have been easily averted? For cursing generations with suffering and death as punishment for the transgressions of their ancestors? And for consigning countless souls to eternal torment for momentary offenses?

This argument presents a significant critique, countering Jesus' response, which essentially asserts that while seeking glory is inappropriate for humans, it is justified for God because He is deemed deserving of it. However, this reasoning raises certain philosophical and theological dilemmas. If Jesus is considered God, then shouldn't He, by the same logic, legitimately demand glory just as Satan provocatively suggested? While John Milton portrays Satan as rendered speechless by this reasoning, in reality, the argument appears flawed and open to challenge. This prompts further questions: What specific deeds make God deserving of glory in this theological context? Should glory be attributed to Him for allowing Satan to escape Hell and corrupt other souls? For permitting humanity to fall when such a catastrophe could have been easily averted? For cursing generations with suffering and death as punishment for the transgressions of their ancestors? And for consigning countless souls to eternal torment for momentary offenses? Following this debate, Satan seizes Jesus and takes Him atop a high mountain, unveiling before Him the vast kingdoms and armies of the earth. He offers Jesus dominion over any of these realms to create His own earthly kingdom and emancipate the Israelites, including the lost ten tribes exiled by the Assyrians, from their oppression. Yet Jesus declines this offer, asserting that the Israelites deserve their captivity as punishment for their sins. He declares His intent to establish His kingdom independently, on His own terms, and in accordance with His own timeline.

Book IV: Satan tempts Christ by offering Him dominion over all the kingdoms of the world, symbolized by the glory of Ancient Rome, in exchange for His loyalty. Christ refuses, rejecting the offer with words rooted in Scripture, specifically the Book of Exodus. Undeterred, Satan attempts anew, presenting the wisdom of Ancient Greece; however, Christ remains steadfast, valuing instead the truths found in the Psalms. In an act of resistance fortified by faith, Jesus continues to deny each temptation, countering every

proposition with divine scripture. After these failures, Satan subjects Him to a night filled with harrowing visions and storms. When this too proves futile, Satan brings Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem, challenging Him to prove His divine origins by casting Himself down and summoning angelic aid. Once more, Jesus refuses. Ultimately defeated, Satan falls, retreating back to his council of demons. Angels come to Jesus, offering Him sustenance, and He returns triumphant to His mother, where this poetic narrative concludes.

In a mountaintop, Satan presents Jesus with a vivid view of imperial Rome's capital city and questions whether He will overthrow the tyrant Emperor Tiberius Caesar and seize the throne for Himself. Jesus firmly dismisses this suggestion, asserting that His mission does not align with such earthly ambitions. He argues that the Roman citizens' suffering reflects their own deserts and declares that His kingdom will transcend and replace all earthly monarchies when it comes. As a final gesture of temptation, Satan offers all the world's kingdoms if Jesus will bow before him. This too is met with resolute rejection. Satan grows increasingly desperate, piling on temptations in rapid succession. He offers the intellectual treasures of Greek philosophy and wisdom, which Jesus dismisses as insubstantial and empty. Satan then turns to the beauty of art and music, only to be rebuffed again; Jesus praises Hebrew music as superior. Exhausted and exasperated by failure, Satan finally demands to know why Jesus rejects wealth, honour, power, art, thought, and fame features of both contemplative and active life asking what purpose He serves in this world at all. Frustrated, Satan returns Jesus to the desolate wilderness but plagues Him that night with tormented dreams and turbulent visions. Undaunted, Jesus resists once more. In a final gambit, Satan leads Christ to Jerusalem's temple and tempts Him to perform an impossible miracle leaping from the temple's pinnacle so angels will intercept Him. Jesus declines again, holding fast to His unwavering obedience to God. With that final defeat, Satan loses his footing and flees in despair.

Following Satan's retreat, angels minister to Jesus in celebration of His victory and provide Him a heavenly feast. Comforted and victorious over evil, He returns peacefully to His mother's home. Viewed together as two parts of a grand theological vision, *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* seem to deliver a unified message: doubt is portrayed as inherently sinful. Critical thinking and questioning are painted as dangerous activities leading only to despair or destruction. The works elevate blind faith and unyielding obedience as the ultimate virtues. Darkness surrounds intellectual inquiry or debate, metaphorically aligning it with moral transgression. This dichotomy aligning faith and reason underscores John Milton's

theological framework one where ignorance serves as “proof” of faith and obedience. Curiously, Milton allows Satan’s arguments throughout these works to hold a certain logic that strains against this overarching theme. Why would an omnipotent God release fallen angels from Hell merely to allow them to create chaos and damn others? Why does God seemingly prize ignorance so highly while discouraging wisdom and understanding? Yet the expectation throughout Milton’s narrative is for readers to reject these questions outright without contemplation or argumentation. In his vision of morality, wrestling with such doubts or seeking clarity is considered dangerous folly.

For those who cherish intellectual exploration and reason as core human attributes, these themes appear deeply unsettling. Our capacity for rational thought has led humanity to unparalleled advancements in understanding our universe through science—a development that stands firmly opposed to the kind of anti-intellectualism presented in these poems. The story Milton weaves serves as an implicit warning against such progress but also raises troubling questions about its own premises. Even within Milton’s work lies evidence contradicting his own message about knowledge versus ignorance. For instance, in *Paradise Lost*, the angel Raphael provides Adam with detailed warnings about Satan’s nature and intentions warnings that do not exist in the biblical account of Genesis. This inclusion subtly suggests that Adam and Eve’s lack of knowledge was a key factor in their susceptibility to sin. Could this addition be Milton tacitly acknowledging a theological paradox? If Adam and Eve were not adequately equipped with understanding or forewarning about the perils of disobedience, does responsibility for their fall not trace back to their Creator? The enforced ignorance of Eden may well have been their greatest vulnerability a provocative point at odds with the rigid.

Conclusion: Milton, in dialogue with the Bible, ingeniously transforms the epic form into a theological exploration. In *Paradise Lost*, he justifies God’s justice by illustrating the dual nature of freedom, both dignified and perilous. Conversely, *Paradise Regained* highlights God’s mercy through its depiction of wisdom in obedience. Both works honour their scriptural foundation while expanding it into a rich poetic vision of redemption. Milton does not aim to surpass Scripture; rather, his accomplishment lies in making its grace accessible and imaginatively comprehensible to readers navigating a world marked by the consequences of humanity’s fall. Nonetheless, even within a literary framework that affords Milton ample space for theological defence and personal justification, logical inconsistencies in this theology remain evident. God’s attempts to justify his actions often fall short, and Jesus’ rebuttals to Satan’s arguments can be notably weak or

flawed. Yet Milton consistently portrays Satan as defeated, silenced, and overcome by these exchanges. In reality, Christian apologetics, faced with informed and critical opposition outside controlled narratives, rarely achieve such definitive triumphs.

It is worth noting that not all Christians share Milton’s theological stance. Many reject doctrines of female subordination, the condemnation of scepticism, and the strict literal interpretation of Genesis. Such divergence demonstrates courage in confronting problematic teachings, yet one cannot ignore the fact that many such ideas are unequivocally present within the Bible itself. Addressing these issues requires more than selectively abandoning troubling passages while clinging to the rest of the Bible it demands questioning its authority and moving beyond its constraints entirely. There was no idyllic Paradise lost through a desire to understand the truths of the world, nor is there an eternal Hell awaiting those who dare to think critically. Fear has no place in honest inquiry. Humanity is not fallen, sinful, or inherently wretched; we are simply human beings equal, capable, and resilient. When we finally awaken from the mythological constructs of our past, we will embrace the clearer light of reality as it truly is. In that awakening lies the genuine pathway toward an earthly paradise, guided by knowledge and understanding unhindered by ancient shadows.

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Exploring Themes of Acceptance, Friendship, and Self-Growth in Durjoy Datta's *Hold My Hand*

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Abstract— The research paper is a humble effort to examine the themes of acceptance, friendship, and self-improvement in Durjoy Datta's *Hold My Hand* (2013), with an emphasis on how these interrelated concepts shape the characters' emotional and psychological development. The narrative, set in modern-day India, follows young people as they navigate vulnerability, love, loss, and healing. This study examines how acceptance, both one's own and others', emerges as a critical basis for emotional stability and personal growth through a close reading of the text. I have tried to establish how Datta in the novel *Hold My Hand* puts his emphasises on friendship as a safe haven that helps characters cope with trauma, loneliness, and dread and how it often serves as a substitute for a family structure. The book depicts friendship as a process of patience, emotional responsibility, and mutual understanding rather than just a social link. Additionally, the issue of self-growth is examined in relation to experiences of care and suffering, demonstrating how times of emotional crisis become opportunities for resilience and maturity. Datta's story highlights the value of empathy and communication in interpersonal connections, particularly for young people dealing with emotional and mental difficulties. Through this paper, I tried to delineate how *Hold My Hand* humanises emotional challenges and presents a positive picture of recovery through connection by situating the book within the context of contemporary juvenile fiction. The study contributes to existing scholarship on popular Indian English fiction dealing with the theme of blending emotional realism with ethical concerns, making it relevant to discussions of identity, mental well-being, and interpersonal relationships in modern society.



Keywords— acceptance, friendship, self-growth, youth fiction, emotional healing.

One of the most popular modern Indian English novelists, Durjoy Datta, is well-known for his exploration of young culture, emotional realism, and interpersonal connections. Love, vulnerability, mental health, and self-discovery are common themes in his writing, which reflect the hopes and fears of young urban Indians. Datta's novels, in contrast to formulaic romance narratives, emphasise ethical issues and emotional depth, often focusing on characters who experience tragedy, loneliness, and a longing for understanding. This method is demonstrated in *Hold My Hand*, which combines a heartfelt love story with thoughtful observations on emotional dependence,

acceptance, and disability. Personal development works as a key factor shaping the characters' lives. Datta presents characters who are emotionally fragile yet resilient, navigating loss, isolation, and fear as they seek meaningful companionship. The narrative suggests that healing is not an individual achievement but a shared process sustained through empathy and emotional support.

Acceptance, especially self-acceptance, in the face of emotional and physical constraints, is a major theme of the novel. By highlighting the emotional cost of infirmity, Datta undermines the idealisation of bravery. The psychological cost of ongoing perseverance is evident

in the blind female protagonist's reflections, which reveal a longing for normalcy rather than appreciation. As Ahana says:

"Being a brave girl with a disability is okay, coping up and living life to the fullest despite the circumstances is great, but all I really want on days like this is to be a normal girl. Not brave, not courageous, just a girl who can have a lot of friends, doesn't have to be a pain in her father's ass, and can look at her own face in the mirror. I wish to be like others, fall in love, hold someone's hand not because I have to, but because I want to; a normal life where I can grow old with someone, have a few kids I can see playing, and maybe pet another dog who doesn't get run over." (Datta 126-127)

Her expression encapsulates the emphasis of the novel on emotional honesty and dignity. Friendship and companionship emerge as spaces where acceptance becomes possible, and self-growth unfolds through shared pain and mutual care. Therefore, *Hold My Hand* humanises emotional suffering and presents connection as the foundation of healing and personal transformation.

Datta creates a story in *Hold My Hand* in which emotional maturity grows through consistent interpersonal interaction rather than abrupt change. The novel challenges common notions of easy recovery by placing young adulthood as a stage characterised by ambiguity, reliance, and moral decision-making. He describes acceptance as a deliberate rewriting of selfhood that necessitates facing internalised anxiety and societal misrecognition rather than as conformity with circumstances. The blind protagonist's perspective shows how society's admiration, often expressed in terms of bravery or inspiration, can become emotionally taxing, depriving her of her right to normal desire and vulnerability. Ahana desires to be seen beyond her disability, challenges societal norms that elevate suffering and shifts focus on emotional agency. The narrative presents physical closeness as arising from personal will rather than obligation, emphasising choice, consent, and emotional independence. Friendship, within this framework, operates as a space of mutual recognition rather than protection, enabling characters to negotiate identity without pity. Self-growth thus unfolds through shared emotional responsibility and honest confrontation with limitation. By privileging interior consciousness and moral accountability, Datta aligns the novel with disability discourse that challenges reductive readings of the body, echoing Garland-Thomson's claim that "the problem is not the body but the interpretation of the body" (6), and reinforcing the text's critique of sentimentalised resilience.

In *Hold My Hand*, friendship serves as an essential counter-space to loneliness and emotional hopelessness. Friendship provides a less demanding but incredibly sustaining kind of connection, in contrast to romantic love, which is frequently rife with expectations and dread of loss. Datta portrays friendship as a moral behaviour based on tolerance, attentiveness, and emotional openness. Through their interactions, the main character, Deep, demonstrates that companionship fosters emotional stability, especially in times of uncertainty and self-doubt. Meaningful relationships are built on emotional safety rather than passion. As literature allows people to "see the world from the point of view of others," this emphasis is consistent with Martha Nussbaum's claim that emotional connections are essential to ethical development (10). In *Hold My Hand*, friendship cultivates this ethical imagination by allowing characters to recognise pain without attempting to fix or romanticise it. The absence of judgment in these relationships enables acceptance to emerge organically rather than through forced reassurance.

Emotional vulnerability is portrayed as a necessary step toward closeness rather than as a sign of weakness. The refusal of the novel to define strength as emotional independence is among its most remarkable features. Rather than emphasising human inadequacy, the novel consistently highlights human dependency. This is clear when the blind protagonist considers monotony and emotional tiredness:

"I'm just tired, tired of the monotony, tired of pitying myself and my dad, tired of being the subject of sympathy for everybody who crosses my path." (Datta 127)

This admission disrupts the heroic disability narrative by foregrounding fatigue and frustration. Friendship, in such moments, becomes a form of quiet resistance against loneliness. Rather than offering solutions, it provides presence, a theme that runs consistently through the novel. The repeated imagery of sitting together, listening to music, or simply sharing silence reinforces the idea that emotional healing does not always require articulation.

In *Hold My Hand*, self-growth is portrayed as an uneven process influenced by both progress and emotional setbacks. Datta depicts character development as cyclical, characterised by regression, uncertainty, and renewed effort, rather than linear. Datta shows a connection with Erik Erikson's theory that identity development is a lifelong process influenced by relational encounters and that the self develops through negotiation rather than resolution, which is consistent with this portrayal (94). This idea of development is supported by the novel's

narrative structure, which alternates between introspection and social contact. In particular, Deep's experience demonstrates how emotional maturity results from emotional accountability rather than performance. Growth and caring, which are focal themes of the novel, are inextricably linked and reinforced by his growing awareness of others' suffering, fostering empathy and introspection.

Touch and music serve as recurrent themes that strengthen self-awareness and emotional connection. The piano scene challenges traditional sensory hierarchies by expressing emotional intimacy through proximity and sound rather than sight. The blind protagonist's musical ability challenges preconceived notions about competence and limitations while simultaneously highlighting the unease of receiving recognition only for overcoming a disability. Her statement that blind people are treated like "circus puppies" highlights the emotional brutality of reductive praise and reveals the contempt ingrained in appreciation (Datta 88). Datta challenges mainstream perceptions of diversity and emphasises the importance of sympathetic participation in these scenarios. In this way, acceptance is both social and personal, necessitating changes in interaction and perception. Friendship becomes the medium through which these shifts are negotiated, allowing characters to redefine themselves beyond imposed roles.

The interconnectedness of acceptance, friendship, and personal development is further reinforced by the idea of caring in *Hold My Hand*. As care is characterised by emotional difficulty, doubt, and constraint rather than sentimentality or idealisation. Datta purposefully steers clear of theatrics by communicating, caring by simple, personal gestures, listening, sitting next to someone, or quietly reassuring them. The idea that healing is ingrained in routine interactions rather than abrupt changes is reinforced by this subtle approach. The act of merely being present carries ethical weight, suggesting that sustained attentiveness, rather than lofty statements, is sufficient to provide emotional support. The piano episode, where emotional intimacy is shown through closeness and shared experience rather than visual identification, has one of the most moving scenes that exemplifies this gentle caring. The blind protagonist's discomfort with praise reveals her acute awareness of how admiration can slip into objectification, highlighting the emotional burden of being constantly framed as exceptional. While admiration appears positive, it reinforces difference and sustains unequal power relations between the observer and the observed. Datta's narrative thus aligns with disability theorists who argue that excessive praise can be as alienating as discrimination. Lennard J. Davis notes that

such narratives often "transform lived experience into spectacle," denying individuals emotional complexity (12). By allowing the character to articulate this discomfort, *Hold My Hand* restores emotional agency and insists on recognition beyond performative resilience.

Further friendship in the novel counters this objectification by offering relationships not founded on sympathy or admiration but mutual vulnerability. Datta presents friendship as a space where emotional honesty is possible without fear of judgment. Unlike romantic relationships, which are often burdened by expectations of fulfilment, friendship allows characters to exist without having to perform roles. This distinction becomes especially significant in moments of emotional exhaustion, when the characters are unable or unwilling to present themselves as hopeful or strong. The repetition of emotional fatigue throughout the novel reinforces the idea that growth does not require constant positivity. The blind protagonist's admission of weariness rejects narratives that equate resilience with silence. Instead, Datta positions fatigue expression as a form of self-acceptance. Emotional honesty becomes an act of resistance against societal expectations of endurance, especially for those marked by difference.

Hold My Hand fits into a larger literary tradition that emphasises affect as essential to moral engagement, owing to this portrayal of emotional reality. According to Raymond Williams' statement that literature is able to convey "structures of feeling" that formal social categories are unable to (132). Datta's book serves as an example of this by expressing feelings like jealousy, tiredness, bitterness, and longing that are socially taboo without passing moral judgment. Despite their discomfort, these feelings serve as catalysts for personal development and self-awareness. In *Hold My Hand*, self-improvement is a continuous process moulded by emotional experiences rather than a resolution or closure. Datta steers clear of final conclusions, implying that development is about learning to live with suffering rather than conquering it. This refusal of closure reflects the lived reality of emotional and physical vulnerability, where progress is measured not by triumph but by endurance and adaptability.

Deep's narrative arc illustrates this understanding of growth. His journey is marked by hesitation, doubt, and emotional dependency, yet these traits are never framed as failures. Instead, they become evidence of emotional openness. His longing, nostalgia, and fear of loss, particularly after returning from Hong Kong, reveal how deeply connection has altered his emotional landscape in these sentences:

"I'm wondering if I would ever see her again, and would she remember me, or would she take someone else to all the places we had been to, and let someone else hold her hand, slip his fingers into hers. It sucks." (Datta 189)

This moment of insecurity underscores the novel's insistence that love and friendship intensify vulnerability rather than eliminate it. Growth, therefore, involves accepting emotional risk as an inevitable consequence of connection. Datta resists narratives that equate maturity with emotional detachment, instead proposing that openness to pain is a sign of ethical engagement with others.

The recurring metaphor of holding hands encapsulates the thematic core of the novel. It symbolises dependence without domination, closeness without possession. Holding hands requires mutual consent, proximity, and trust, making it an apt metaphor for ethical relationships. The blind protagonist's desire to hold someone's hand foregrounds choice as central to dignity. Physical support, when chosen rather than imposed, becomes an expression of agency rather than limitation. Martin Buber's concept of the "I-Thou" relationship emphasises mutual recognition and presence as the foundation of ethical interaction (62). In *Hold My Hand*, relationships grounded in such recognition enable characters to see each other as whole individuals rather than roles to be fulfilled. Friendship and love become spaces of encounter rather than consumption.

Datta's language is essential to maintaining this moral code. To reflect the vulnerability it aims to convey, the text is deliberately conversational, intimate, and emotionally transparent. The novel connects serious emotional inquiry with popular fiction through this artistic decision. *Hold My Hand* defies trivialisation by tackling difficult emotional states with sincerity and moderation, despite being frequently classified as adolescent fiction. Its accessibility enhances its capacity to provoke readers' ethical reflection rather than undermining its conceptual profundity. Datta's book serves the purpose by providing readers with a vocabulary to express vulnerability while addressing emotional suffering without cynicism.

Hold My Hand, in fact, portrays self-improvement, companionship, and acceptance as interrelated factors that mould ethical subjectivity. Acceptance manifests as active acknowledgement of emotional reality rather than passive tolerance. While self-growth occurs through ongoing emotional involvement rather than resolution, friendship provides the relational foundation that makes such recognition possible. Thus, Datta's book questions popular myths of self-reliance and

fortitude by arguing that healing is relational, gradual, and fundamentally human. *Hold My Hand* makes a significant contribution to modern Indian English literature by humanising emotional struggle and rejecting simplistic depictions of adolescence or handicap. Its focus on compassion, empathy, and emotional integrity validates the literature's ability to foster moral consciousness and emotional literacy. By foregrounding the simple yet profound act of holding one another's hand, Datta reminds readers that growth often begins not with strength but with the willingness to reach out.

CONCLUSION

In the setting of modern metropolitan life, *Hold My Hand* is a delicate, emotionally based investigation of acceptance, friendship, and personal development. The book emphasises emotional vulnerability as a defining feature of the human experience, going beyond traditional love storylines. Datta undermines prevailing cultural notions of power and independence by depicting individuals who battle handicap, loneliness, and emotional ambiguity. Instead, it emphasises empathy, caring, and relational assistance as crucial to personal healing. Acceptance is portrayed as a continuous process that involves acknowledging one's limitations without sacrificing one's dignity or desires. While self-growth develops gradually via emotional honesty and shared experience, friendship serves as a stabilising factor that permits characters to express fear, exhaustion, and longing without fear of condemnation. *Hold My Hand*, therefore, confirms that real connection and mutual acknowledgement, rather than loneliness or emotional repression, are the sources of progress. Datta's focus on commonplace acts of touch, presence, listening, and care emphasises how literature can humanise suffering and promote ethical consciousness. Thus, by emphasising emotional realism and reiterating the transformational power of compassionate connections, the work makes an important contribution to modern Indian English writing.

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Depictions of Violence and Criminality: Youth Implications in Contemporary Malayalam Cinema (2021–2024)

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Abstract— This study investigates six Malayalam films from 2021–2024—*Aavesham*, *Marco*, *Bheeshma Parvam*, *RDX*, *Turbo*, and *Kannur Squad*—to analyze depictions of violence and criminality and their potential effects on youth aged 13–25. Collectively earning over ₹600 crore, these films signify Kerala's evolving cinematic landscape. Employing a qualitative content approach, the study integrates direct film analysis with critical reviews from prominent newspapers. Organized thematically from gangsterism to vigilantism, it identifies a violence range (6–12 incidents/hour) and diverse criminal archetypes. Findings indicate varied youth responses, from aggression modeling to resilience, underscoring the need for media literacy given Kerala's mental health context, evaluated through established psychological perspectives



Keywords— Malayalam Cinema, Violence, Criminality, Youth Influence, Kerala

I. INTRODUCTION

The pervasive presence of violence in cinematic narratives has long been a subject of scrutiny, with growing concerns about its potential to shape human behavior, particularly among young audiences. In recent years, Malayalam cinema has undergone a notable shift toward violent and criminal themes, exemplified by films such as *Marco* (2024), described as a visceral gangster thriller (The Hindu, 2024a), and *Aavesham* (2024), whose flamboyant gangster protagonist has sparked widespread cultural resonance (The News Minute, 2024b). This trend aligns with broader societal developments in Kerala, where the Kerala State Youth Commission (2023) reports a suicide rate of 27.2 per lakh in 2021—exceeding the national average of 12.0—with males (79.6%) and the 18–40 age group most affected, alongside significant psychological distress and interpersonal conflicts (31.3%) among youth (National Crime Records Bureau, 2021). These statistics underscore a pressing context for examining media's role, as violent cinematic portrayals may intersect with such vulnerabilities, prompting public discourse on their influence. This study investigates the portrayal of violence and criminality in six

popular Malayalam films from 2021 to 2024—*Aavesham* (2024), *Marco* (2024), *Bheeshma Parvam* (2022), *RDX: Robert Dony Xavier* (2023), *Turbo* (2024), and *Kannur Squad* (2023)—and assesses their potential influence on young viewers aged 13–25, situating this analysis within a robust body of global research on media violence and its behavioral impacts. These films are sequenced thematically, beginning with gangsterism (*Aavesham*, *Marco*, *Bheeshma Parvam*) and progressing to vigilantism (*RDX*, *Turbo*, *Kannur Squad*), to reflect the evolution of criminality portrayals and their varying effects on youth perceptions.

Decades of psychological and sociological research have established a correlation between exposure to violent media, including films, and increased aggressive behavior, particularly among children and adolescents. Early experimental work by Bandura, Ross, and Ross (1961) demonstrated that children observing aggressive behavior in a film were more likely to imitate it, with significant behavioral shifts observed in controlled settings (Bandura et al., 1961). This foundational finding underpins Social Learning Theory, which posits that individuals learn

behaviors through observation and imitation, especially when violence is rewarded or justified (Bandura, 1977). Subsequent meta-analyses have quantified this relationship: Paik and Comstock (1994) reviewed 217 studies, finding a moderate correlation ($r = .38$) between television and film violence and aggression in experimental settings, with a smaller but significant effect ($r = .19$) in longitudinal and cross-sectional data, and a specific effect size of $r = .32$ for physical violence, suggesting a tangible risk extending to real-world behaviors (Paik & Comstock, 1994).

Longitudinal research further illuminates the enduring impact of media violence. Huesmann et al. (2003) tracked individuals over 22 years, finding that childhood exposure to violent television predicted increased aggression in adulthood, with high viewers significantly more likely to engage in violent acts—e.g., 42% of males pushed their spouse (vs. 22% for low viewers), and 17% of females punched or choked their spouse (vs. 4%) (Huesmann et al., 2003). These findings align with Social Cognitive Theory, which argues that repeated exposure fosters aggressive scripts and desensitization, normalizing violence as a problem-solving mechanism (Huesmann, 1986). Cultivation Theory complements this, suggesting that heavy media consumption cultivates a “mean world syndrome,” where viewers perceive reality as more violent, potentially amplifying aggressive tendencies (Gerbner et al., 1980). The General Aggression Model (GAM) integrates these mechanisms, proposing that media violence primes aggressive thoughts, increases arousal, and shapes long-term beliefs about violence’s acceptability (Anderson & Bushman, 2002).

Globally, evidence is consistent across cultures. Anderson et al. (2017) conducted a cross-cultural study across seven countries (e.g., Australia, Japan, U.S.), confirming that violent media exposure correlates with aggression, with effect sizes mirroring earlier findings (Anderson et al., 2017). Short-term effects include priming—where violent content activates aggressive cognitions—and mimicry, particularly among children, while long-term exposure leads to desensitization and script learning (Carnagey et al., 2007). Adolescents are especially vulnerable due to their developmental stage and high media consumption, averaging 7 hours and 22 minutes daily for teens aged 13–18 (Rideout & Robb, 2019). Demographic factors amplify this risk: males, older children, and those from minority backgrounds with less-educated parents are more exposed and susceptible (Gentile et al., 2004).

Despite this robust evidence, the field remains contentious. Critics argue that effect sizes ($r = .20$ – $.30$) are modest, with genetics, family environment, and socioeconomic status exerting stronger influences (Ferguson & Kilburn, 2010).

Methodological critiques highlight failures to control for confounding variables or distinguish minor aggression (e.g., verbal outbursts) from serious violence, with some studies showing no significant link (Freedman, 2002). The Catalyst Model posits that media violence plays a stylistic rather than motivational role, overshadowed by innate and social factors (Ferguson, 2015). This debate underscores the complexity of isolating media’s impact, yet even small effects warrant attention given their societal scale. Anderson et al. (2003) compare the correlation between media violence and aggression to that between smoking and lung cancer ($r \approx .20$ – $.30$), a link that spurred major public health interventions (Anderson et al., 2003). In the U.S., firearm injuries—partly tied to violence exposure—cost \$48 billion annually, with over 32,000 deaths (Fowler et al., 2015), illustrating the public health stakes.

In Kerala, global concerns about media violence resonate with local debates over Malayalam cinema’s aggressive shift. Films like *RDX* (2023), lauded for its martial arts spectacle (The News Minute, 2023a), and *Marco* (2024), noted for visceral revenge (The Hindu, 2024a), mirror international patterns of media influence. This study analyzes these six films using reviews from English (*The Hindu*, *The Indian Express*, *The News Minute*, *Times of India*, *India Today*, *New Indian Express*) and Malayalam (*Mathrubhumi*, *Malayala Manorama*) sources to explore violence and criminality patterns. Applying Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), Cultivation Theory (Gerbner et al., 1980), and desensitization research (Carnagey et al., 2007), it assesses their potential to shape youth attitudes (13–25), offering a critical lens on cinema’s evolving role in Kerala’s social landscape without claiming causation.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study investigates contemporary Malayalam films from 2021–2024, selected for their thematic diversity, violence spectrum (~6–12 incidents per hour), and cultural impact, as evidenced by box office earnings ranging from ₹70–150 crore and critical acclaim from prominent sources such as *The Hindu* and *The News Minute* (The Hindu, 2022a; The Hindu, 2023a; The Hindu, 2023b; The Hindu, 2024a; The Hindu, 2024b; The Hindu, 2024c; The News Minute, 2023a; The News Minute, 2023b; The News Minute, 2024a; The News Minute, 2024b; The News Minute, 2024c). The six films—*Avesham* (2024), *Marco* (2024), *Bheeshma Parvam* (2022), *RDX: Robert Dony Xavier* (2023), *Turbo* (2024), and *Kannur Squad* (2023)—span genres from gangster comedy to cop thriller, capturing Kerala’s cinematic evolution post-COVID and reflecting youth exposure (13–25) through relatable settings and star power, including Mammootty and Fahadh Faasil (Kerala

State Youth Commission, 2023). Narrower genres, such as superhero narratives like *Minnal Murali*, were excluded to prioritize works with broad societal influence, aligning with qualitative research principles that emphasize depth and context (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

A qualitative content approach examines portrayals of violence and criminality through a dual lens: direct analysis of the films' content and insights drawn from critical reviews in English (*The Hindu*, *The Indian Express*, *The News Minute*, *Times of India*, *India Today*, *New Indian Express*) and Malayalam (*Mathrubhumi*, *Malayala Manorama*) newspapers. The film content analysis assesses violence frequency, type, and narrative context, alongside criminality themes such as gangsterism, vigilantism, and corruption, providing a foundational understanding of each work's thematic structure. This is complemented by reviews, which offer cultural reception perspectives and critical interpretations, enriching the analysis with external viewpoints on societal impact (The Hindu, 2024a; Times of India, 2024a). Violence incidents per hour were calculated by dividing the total number of acts—derived from detailed examination of the films and corroborated by review descriptions—by their runtime, ensuring precision and consistency across all six analyses (e.g., *Marco*'s 10–12/hour, *Aavesham*'s 7–8/hour).

The sequence of analysis—*Aavesham*, *Marco*, *Bheeshma Parvam*, *RDX*, *Turbo*, *Kannur Squad*—is structured thematically to enhance coherence and comparative insight into criminality's portrayal and its influence on youth. The first three films (*Aavesham*, *Marco*, *Bheeshma Parvam*) explore gangsterism, presenting criminal underworlds with varying violence intensities: moderate (7–8/hour), high (10–12/hour), and low (6–7/hour), respectively, reflecting the allure and complexity of such narratives (Mathrubhumi, 2024a). The subsequent three (*RDX*, *Turbo*, *Kannur Squad*) focus on vigilantism, showcasing justice-driven responses from high (11–12/hour) to moderate (8–9/hour) to low (6–7/hour) violence, emphasizing moral grounding and societal duty (The News Minute, 2023a). This progression from gangsterism's potential glamorization to vigilantism's righteous action mirrors the study's examination of criminality's dual nature—glamorous versus justified—and its varying effects on youth perceptions, facilitating a logical flow that aligns with the thematic synthesis in the discussion (Nair, 2020). Psychological frameworks—Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), Cultivation Theory (Gerbner et al., 1980), and desensitization research (Carnagey et al., 2007)—evaluate potential youth influence, exploring how these portrayals might model aggression, normalize violence, or alter sensitivity thresholds. Each film receives a comprehensive analysis synthesizing these findings, situating cinema's societal role within Kerala's

youth media trends, as informed by regional mental health data (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023). This method delivers a robust, context-driven examination, avoiding claims of direct causation while leveraging both intrinsic content and extrinsic critique for a holistic perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

III. ANALYSIS

This section analyzes the portrayal of violence and criminality in aforementioned six Malayalam films and assesses their potential influence on youth aged 13–25, drawing on critical reviews from English (*The Hindu*, *The Indian Express*, *The News Minute*, *Times of India*, *India Today*, *New Indian Express*) and Malayalam (*Mathrubhumi*, *Malayala Manorama*) sources. Each film's violence frequency, type, and context, along with criminality themes, are examined using Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), Cultivation Theory (Gerbner et al., 1980), and desensitization research (Carnagey et al., 2007), contextualized by Kerala's youth mental health data (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

Aavesham (2024)

Aavesham, directed by Jithu Madhavan and released on April 11, 2024, is a Malayalam gangster comedy that grossed over ₹150 crore, underscoring its cultural impact (Manorama Online, 2024a). Starring Fahadh Faasil as Ranga, a flamboyant Bengaluru don, the film follows three college students—Bibi, Santhan, and Aju—who enlist his aid to avenge a brutal ragging incident by seniors (Times of India, 2024a). With a 2-hour-38-minute runtime (158 minutes, verified via SRT) and a UA rating, it blends action and humor, earning acclaim for its “electrifying” sequences and Faasil's “towering performance” (India Today, 2024a). Critics laud its “crowd-pleasing antics” (Mathrubhumi, 2024a) and Faasil's “uninhibited act” that carries a thinly plotted narrative (The Hindu, 2024a). Its appeal to youth aged 15–35 mirrors Kerala's cinematic trends, akin to *Romancham* and *Premalu* (Manorama Online, 2024a).

Violence in *Aavesham* averages approximately 7–8 incidents per hour, totaling around 18 physical acts—slaps, punches, and beatings—often presented comically, such as Ranga's “slow beating” directive (Manorama Online, 2024a; Mathrubhumi, 2024a). Compared to *Marco* (~10–12/hour) or *Kannur Squad* (~6–7/hour), its violence is moderate (Times of India, 2024a). A standout scene features Ranga fighting 100 opponents, described as “exceptionally intense” yet bloodless, unlike *RDX*'s martial flair (Manorama Online, 2024a). The Hindu (2024a) notes tension peaks not in fights but during a dumb charades game, highlighting its unconventional approach. The stylized, non-graphic violence, driven by student rivalries

escalating to gang conflicts, likely reduces desensitization risks compared to gorier depictions (Times of India, 2024a; Carnagey et al., 2007). This aligns with the Kerala State Youth Commission's (2023) finding that hanging, a prevalent yet bloodless suicide method (76.6%), reflects cultural familiarity with less graphic violence portrayals (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

Criminality revolves around gangsterism, petty crime, and loyalty, with Ranga's "empire" implied but not fully depicted, focusing on his charismatic persona (India Today, 2024a). He shifts from a formidable don to a protector, aiding the students' vengeance with a light-hearted tone, contrasting *Bheeshma Parvam*'s darker underworld (Times of India, 2024a). Critics describe him as having a "heart of gold," romanticizing his outlaw status through humor (Manorama Online, 2024a; Mathrubhumi, 2024a), though *The Hindu* (2024a) praises the ambiguity in his character, revealed in scenes like the dumb charades sequence, distinguishing him from *Marco*'s ruthlessness or *Kannur Squad*'s critique (The Hindu, 2024a). The students' brief engagement in criminal acts, like hiring Ranga for "contract fights," leads to consequences such as failing exams, adding narrative weight (Times of India, 2024a). This resonates with the Kerala State Youth Commission's (2023) observation that interpersonal issues (e.g., toxic relationships, 31.3%) and educational pressures contribute to youth distress (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

Aavesham's influence on youth aged 15–35 is moderate-to-high, driven by its college setting and Fahadh Faasil's "teen idol" status, resonating with audiences (Manorama Online, 2024a). Social Learning Theory suggests Ranga's rewarded aggression—celebrated in triumphant fight scenes—may model violence as a solution to peer conflicts like ragging (Bandura, 1977). Cultivation Theory indicates its ~7–8 violent incidents per hour could normalize aggression, though humor lessens the impact compared to *Marco*'s gore (Gerbner et al., 1980). The non-graphic violence mitigates desensitization risks (Carnagey et al., 2007). However, *The Hindu* (2024a) notes a post-interval lull as the film shifts from hero worship to a cautionary tale, while Mathrubhumi (2024a) highlights its "unique tonal balance," suggesting a nuanced influence (India Today, 2024a; Times of India, 2024a). Ranga's glamorized gangster image, paired with relatable young actors, may encourage viewing criminal solutions favorably, despite academic consequences (India Today, 2024a; Times of India, 2024a). This aligns with the Kerala State Youth Commission's (2023) findings that youth with low education (SSLC and plus two, 62.4%) and psychological distress are at higher suicide risk, with 79.3% having close family ties yet succumbing to external stressors (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

Kerala's suicide rate of 27.2 per lakh in 2021 exceeds the national average of 12.0, with males (79.6%) and the 18–40 age group most affected (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023; National Crime Records Bureau, 2021). Ragging, a trigger in the film, mirrors interpersonal conflicts linked to 31.3% of suicides, while the survey's focus on addiction and financial crises contrasts with *Aavesham*'s lighter tone, yet underscores its relevance to youth facing distress (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023). Unlike *RDX*'s intense action or *Kannur Squad*'s duty-driven narrative, *Aavesham* stands out for its humorous anti-hero, blending violence and criminality accessibly. Its tonal balance—less brutal than *Marco* and less restrained than *Kannur Squad*—marks it as a unique entry in Malayalam cinema's post-COVID landscape, meriting further study given Kerala's youth mental health challenges (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023; Mathrubhumi, 2024a).

Aavesham weaves stylized violence and romanticized criminality with humor, posing risks of modeling aggression among youth while curbing desensitization through its non-graphic approach. Its college setting and star power heighten its appeal, potentially glamorizing criminal solutions to distress, though a shift to cautionary tones and academic consequences add nuance (The Hindu, 2024a). In Kerala, where suicide rates are high and linked to education and interpersonal issues, the film's influence warrants deeper exploration of its societal role in the cinematic context (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

***Marco* (2024)**

Marco, directed by Haneef Adeni and released on December 20, 2024, is a Malayalam gangster thriller that grossed over ₹100 crore, reflecting its commercial success despite polarizing reviews (The Hindu, 2024a). Starring Unni Mukundan as Marco Jr., the film traces his vengeful rampage following his family's murder, set in Kerala's underworld. With a 2-hour-24-minute runtime (144 minutes, verified via SRT) and an A rating, it diverges from *Aavesham*'s humor and *Kannur Squad*'s duty-driven narrative, embracing raw aggression. Critics praise its "unapologetic gore" (Malayala Manorama, 2024a) and "visceral intensity" (Mathrubhumi, 2024a), with Mukundan's "ferocious anti-hero" turn lauded as a 2024 standout (The News Minute, 2024a). However, reviews like *The Hindu* (2024a) and *New Indian Express* (2024a) criticize its weak script and excessive violence, labeling it a "dark chapter" in Indian cinema (Times of India, 2024a).

Violence in *Marco* averages 10–12 incidents per hour, totaling approximately 25 acts across its runtime, the highest among the six films analyzed (The Hindu, 2024a). Specific scenes include stabbings, massacres, and extreme acts like the murder of a pregnant woman and a child's head

smashed with a gas cylinder (Indian Express, 2024a; Times of India, 2024a). Surpassing *Aavesham*'s 7–8 incidents per hour and aligning with *RDX*'s frequency, its graphic nature exceeds both, driven by revenge after family betrayal and gang supremacy (The News Minute, 2024a). Critics note its “pure sadism” lacks *Turbo*'s stylization or *Aavesham*'s comedy (Times of India, 2024a; Mathrubhumi, 2024a), with director VC Abhilash calling it a “dark chapter in Indian cinema history” (Times of India, 2024a). This graphic portrayal, termed “unprecedented” in Indian cinema (Malayala Manorama, 2024a), aligns with studies on cinematic violence amplifying aggression (Bushman & Anderson, 2009). The Kerala State Youth Commission (2023) reports hanging (76.6%) as a prevalent suicide method, suggesting a cultural tolerance for violent imagery that *Marco* intensifies (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

Criminality in *Marco* centers on organized crime, murder, and betrayal, with *Marco* entrenched in Kerala's underworld (The News Minute, 2024a). His family's legacy fuels a murder spree, more savage than *Bheeshma Parvam*'s conflicts (The Hindu, 2024a). Betrayal drives his vendetta, contrasting *Aavesham*'s lighter tone (The Hindu, 2024a). Critics portray him as a “tragic avenger,” romanticizing his brutality without *Turbo*'s justice or *Kannur Squad*'s critique (Malayala Manorama, 2024a; Mathrubhumi, 2024a), amplifying his outlaw allure devoid of moral restraint (The South First, 2024a). The Kerala State Youth Commission (2023) links interpersonal issues (e.g., toxic relationships, 31.3%) to youth suicide, suggesting *Marco*'s betrayal theme resonates with real stressors (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

Marco's influence on youth aged 13–25 is high, intensified by its graphic content and A rating, restricting it to adults yet accessible to teens via cultural reach (India Today, 2024b). Social Learning Theory posits that its rewarded brutality models extreme aggression, appealing to identity conflicts (Bandura, 1977; Erikson, 1968). Cultivation Theory suggests its ~10–12 violent incidents per hour normalize gore, exceeding *Aavesham*'s impact (Gerbner et al., 1980; The News Minute, 2024a). Desensitization risks peak with graphic acts unmitigated by humor (Carnagey et al., 2007; New Indian Express, 2024a). Critics highlight its “teen fascination” and “ferocious appeal,” risking mimicry without *RDX*'s moral buffer (Mathrubhumi, 2024a; Malayala Manorama, 2024a), with Mukundan defending its realism as reflecting societal violence (Times of India, 2024b). Kerala's setting heightens relatability (The News Minute, 2024a). Kerala's suicide rate (27.2 per lakh in 2021) exceeds the national average (12.0), with males (79.6%) and the 18–40 age group most affected (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023; National Crime Records

Bureau, 2021). Psychological distress (noted in a significant percentage of victims) and interpersonal conflicts (31.3%) align with *Marco*'s themes, potentially triggering vulnerable youth (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023). Despite 79.3% of victims having close family ties, external stressors prevail, suggesting *Marco*'s intense narrative could exacerbate risks (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

Unlike *Aavesham*'s humor-tempered violence or *Bheeshma Parvam*'s restraint, *Marco*'s unrelenting gore and lack of moral nuance pose higher risks. Compared to *Kannur Squad*'s duty focus or *RDX*'s protective undertones, it stands as a visceral outlier in Malayalam cinema's post-COVID evolution, meriting scrutiny given Kerala's youth mental health challenges (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023; The News Minute, 2024a). *Marco* blends intense violence and unrepentant criminality, posing a high risk of modeling aggression and desensitizing youth. Its commercial success and Kerala setting amplify its influence, potentially resonating with real-world stressors like betrayal and distress identified in Kerala's youth (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023). Lacking mitigating factors of humor or morality, its societal impact warrants further study.

***Bheeshma Parvam* (2022)**

Bheeshma Parvam, directed by Amal Neerad, premiered on March 3, 2022, as a Malayalam gangster drama, grossing over ₹100 crore (The Hindu, 2022a). Starring Mammooty as Michael, patriarch of Kochi's Anjootty family, it explores power, betrayal, and revenge amid rival factions. Set in Kerala's coastal underworld, it blends stylized action with emotional depth, earning acclaim for Mammooty's “godfather aura” and “cult appeal” (Mathrubhumi, 2022a; The Hindu, 2022a). Critics praise its “emotional resonance” (The News Minute, 2022a), distinguishing it from *Marco*'s brutality and *Turbo*'s humor, with a 2-hour-24-minute runtime (144 minutes, verified via SRT) and a UA rating (The Hindu, 2022a).

Violence averages ~6–7 incidents per hour across its 2-hour-24-minute runtime, aligning with *Kannur Squad* but below *RDX*'s ~11–12/hour and *Marco*'s ~10–12/hour, with ~15 acts (The Hindu, 2023a; The Hindu, 2023b; The Hindu, 2024a). It features restrained physical beatings and murders, plus threats like “cut you up,” avoiding *Marco*'s gore or *RDX*'s martial flair (Mathrubhumi, 2024a; Mathrubhumi, 2023a; Bushman & Anderson, 2009). Driven by family power and revenge—Michael's discipline and Ajaz's vendetta—it contrasts *Turbo*'s protection (The News Minute, 2022a; The News Minute, 2024a). Violence is glorified with emotional restraint, unlike *Marco*'s excess (Malayala Manorama, 2022a). *Times of India* (2022a) rates

it 3.5/5 for its slick execution, noting minimal violence serves emotional stakes (Times of India, 2022a). The Kerala State Youth Commission (2023) reports hanging as a prevalent suicide method (76.6%), suggesting cultural familiarity with restrained violent imagery that *Bheeshma Parvam* reflects (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

Criminality focuses on gangsterism, murder, and corruption, with Michael's underworld reign echoing *Aavesham*'s Ranga (The Hindu, 2024b). Murders and political graft fuel the plot, akin to *Kannur Squad*'s critique but distinct from *Turbo*'s vigilantism (The Hindu, 2023a; The News Minute, 2024a). Critics note Michael's "noble gangster" persona, romanticized yet tempered by loyalty, contrasting *Marco*'s unrepentant savagery (Mathrubhumi, 2022a; Malayala Manorama, 2024a). Betrayal adds moral clarity, unlike *Aavesham*'s playful crime (The News Minute, 2022a; The Hindu, 2024b). *Times of India* (2022a) highlights family power struggles, suggesting resonance with youth facing relational dynamics (Times of India, 2022a).

Bheeshma Parvam's influence on youth aged 13–25 is moderate, driven by Mammootty's star power and UA-rated accessibility (The Hindu, 2022a). Social Learning Theory suggests Michael's rewarded power models authoritative aggression, appealing to identity struggles (Bandura, 1977; Erikson, 1968). Cultivation Theory indicates its ~6–7/hour violence could normalize gang dynamics, less intense than *RDX* (Gerbner et al., 1980; The News Minute, 2023a). Desensitization is limited by restraint, unlike *Marco*'s graphic impact (Carnagey et al., 2007; The Hindu, 2024a). Its "cult appeal" risks mimicry, tempered by emotional depth, with Kochi's setting boosting relatability (The Hindu, 2022a; Malayala Manorama, 2022a). It contrasts *Turbo*'s humor and *Aavesham*'s satire (The News Minute, 2024a; Mathrubhumi, 2024c). *Manorama Online* (2022a) notes strong youth engagement via audience reviews (Manorama Online, 2022a). Kerala's suicide rate of 27.2 per lakh in 2021 exceeds the national average of 12.0, with males (79.6%) and the 18–40 age group most affected (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023; National Crime Records Bureau, 2021). Psychological distress (significant percentage), low education (62.4%), and interpersonal conflicts (31.3%) are key factors, with 79.3% of victims having close family ties yet succumbing (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023). *Bheeshma Parvam*'s themes of power and loyalty might resonate with youth facing distress, potentially modeling authority as a coping mechanism, though its restraint could mitigate negative effects (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

Unlike *Aavesham*'s satire or *Marco*'s gore, *Bheeshma Parvam*'s restrained violence and romanticized criminality,

balanced by emotion, pose a notable youth influence, modeling aggression with restraint (The News Minute, 2022a). Its nuanced anti-hero narrative distinguishes it from *Marco*'s brutality and *Kannur Squad*'s duty, meriting further exploration in Malayalam cinema's post-COVID evolution given Kerala's youth mental health challenges (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

***RDX: Robert Dony Xavier* (2023)**

RDX: Robert Dony Xavier, directed by Nahas Hidayath, premiered on August 25, 2023, as a Malayalam action film, grossing over ₹80 crore and establishing its commercial success (The Hindu, 2023a). Starring Shane Nigam, Antony Varghese, and Neeraj Madhav as martial artist brothers—Robert, Dony, and Xavier—it depicts their violent retaliation against Paulson's gang after a family attack during a Kerala church festival. With a 2-hour-30-minute runtime (150 minutes, verified via SRT) and a UA rating, it blends high-octane action with familial loyalty, earning praise for "stylized, crowd-pleasing action" and "adrenaline-pumping justice" (The Hindu, 2023a; The News Minute, 2023a). Critics highlight its choreography and emotional resonance, with *Times of India* (2023a) and *Indian Express* (2023a) rating it 3.5/5, while *Mathrubhumi* (2023a) notes its appeal as an Onam festive hit for youth.

Violence in *RDX* averages ~11–12 incidents per hour across its 2-hour-30-minute runtime, among the highest of the six films, with ~25 acts escalating to ~28 (The Hindu, 2023a). It rivals *Marco*'s ~10–12/hour and exceeds *Aavesham*'s ~7–8/hour, featuring physical combat—punches, knifeplay, and threats like "eternal sleep" (Mathrubhumi, 2023a; The Hindu, 2024b). Unlike *Marco*'s gore or *Aavesham*'s comedy, *RDX*'s martial artistry is stylized, driven by family defense and gang rivalry (The News Minute, 2023a; Bushman & Anderson, 2009). Violence is glorified as heroic, tempered by a protective narrative, contrasting *Marco*'s brutality with moral grounding (Malayala Manorama, 2023a; The Hindu, 2024a). *Indian Express* (2023a) praises its explosive sequences, while *The Hindu* (2023a) critiques its depiction of economically disadvantaged colony residents as violent hooligans, raising social implications (The Hindu, 2023a). *Times of India* (2023a) questions whether it glorifies rage amid post-COVID youth crime trends (Times of India, 2023a). The Kerala State Youth Commission (2023) notes hanging as a prevalent suicide method (76.6%), indicating cultural familiarity with violent imagery that *RDX* stylizes rather than intensifies graphically (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

Criminality centers on vigilantism, gang activity, and revenge, with Paulson's hooch-dealing gang sparking the brothers' street justice (The Hindu, 2023a). It mirrors

Bheeshma Parvam's underworld but lacks *Aavesham*'s playfulness (The Hindu, 2022a; The News Minute, 2024a). Critics note its "righteous" vigilantism, contrasting *Marco*'s unrepentant crime with a condemned gang (The News Minute, 2023a; Mathrubhumi, 2024b). This moral duality distinguishes it from *Kannur Squad*'s systemic focus (The Hindu, 2023b). *Indian Express* (2023a) praises its balanced screenplay ensuring all leads' significance, enhancing its narrative of justice (Indian Express, 2023a). *Times of India* (2023a) highlights its righteous undertone, reinforcing the moral grounding of the brothers' actions (Times of India, 2023a).

RDX's influence on youth aged 13–25 is high, driven by its intense action and mass appeal, suitable for festive season viewing with a UA rating (Times of India, 2023a). Social Learning Theory suggests its rewarded violence models aggression as family protection, appealing to loyalty instincts (Bandura, 1977; Erikson, 1968). Cultivation Theory indicates its ~11–12 violent incidents per hour normalize combat, surpassing *Aavesham* and nearing *Marco* (Gerbner et al., 1980; The Hindu, 2024a). Desensitization risks are moderate, less graphic than *Marco* (Carnagey et al., 2007; Malayala Manorama, 2024a). Its "cool factor" and Kerala festival setting boost relatability, risking imitation, though family ties temper excess unlike *Marco*'s brutality (Mathrubhumi, 2023a; The News Minute, 2024a). *Indian Express* (2023a) commends its mass appeal to youth craving action (Indian Express, 2023a), while *Times of India* (2023a) questions its glorification of rage amidst rising youth crime post-COVID (Times of India, 2023a). Kerala's suicide rate of 27.2 per lakh in 2021 exceeds the national average of 12.0, with males (79.6%) and the 18–40 age group most affected (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023; National Crime Records Bureau, 2021). The Kerala State Youth Commission (2023) identifies psychological distress (noted in a significant percentage), interpersonal conflicts (31.3%), and low education (62.4%) as key factors, with 79.3% of victims having close family ties yet succumbing to external stressors (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023). *RDX*'s themes of family defense and community violence during festivals could resonate with these vulnerabilities, potentially modeling aggression as a coping mechanism (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023). However, its moral framework and emphasis on loyalty might counterbalance this by reinforcing protective values, contrasting *Marco*'s nihilism (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

Unlike *RDX*'s intense action or *Kannur Squad*'s duty-driven narrative, *RDX* distinguishes itself with high violence and heroic vigilantism, posing a strong youth influence with moderate desensitization risks due to its stylized approach (The News Minute, 2023a). Compared to

Marco's unrelenting gore or *Kannur Squad*'s restrained narrative, *RDX* balances action with emotional stakes, marking it as a potent entry in Malayalam cinema's post-COVID evolution, warranting further study given Kerala's youth mental health challenges (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023; The News Minute, 2023a). In brief, *RDX*'s high violence and heroic vigilantism pose a strong youth influence, modeling aggression with moral restraint, unlike *Aavesham*'s playfulness or *Turbo*'s justice. Its emotional stakes enhance its potency in Malayalam cinema (The Hindu, 2023a).

***Turbo* (2024)**

Turbo, directed by Vysakh, premiered on May 23, 2024, as a Malayalam action-comedy, grossing over ₹70 crore, affirming its commercial success (The Hindu, 2024c). Starring Mammooty as Turbo Jose, an Idukki jeep driver turned vigilante, the film follows his fight against a Chennai banking scam after a family-targeted attack. Set across Kerala's festive backdrop and Tamil Nadu's urban sprawl, it blends action with humor, earning acclaim for Mammooty's "youthful energy" and "family-friendly action" (The Hindu, 2024c; The News Minute, 2024a). Critics highlight its "mass appeal" (Mathrubhumi, 2024b), with *Times of India* (2024b) rating it 3/5, though *New Indian Express* (2024a) notes a "vapid" screenplay, distinguishing it from *Marco*'s brutality and *Aavesham*'s satire (Mathrubhumi, 2024b). With a 2-hour-41-minute runtime (161 minutes, verified via SRT) and a UA rating, it targets youth aged 13–25 through relatable settings and star power.

Violence averages ~8–9 incidents per hour across its 2-hour-41-minute runtime, between *RDX*'s ~11–12/hour and *Aavesham*'s ~7–8/hour, with ~20 acts escalating to ~22 (The Hindu, 2023a; The Hindu, 2024b). It includes physical stabbings, beatings, and crashes, plus threats like "chop all your heads off," softened by humor (Mathrubhumi, 2024b). Unlike *Marco*'s gore or *RDX*'s martial precision, *Turbo*'s stylized action—driven by family defense and criminal pursuit—contrasts *Kannur Squad*'s restraint (The News Minute, 2024a; The Hindu, 2023b; Bushman & Anderson, 2009). Violence is glorified as heroic, with a comedic and moral overlay, unlike *Marco*'s unrelenting edge (Malayala Manorama, 2024b). *New Indian Express* (2024a) emphasizes Mammooty's dynamic punches fitting the family-friendly tone (New Indian Express, 2024a). The Kerala State Youth Commission (2023) reports hanging as a prevalent suicide method (76.6%), indicating cultural familiarity with violent imagery that *Turbo* stylizes rather than escalates graphically (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

Criminality revolves around kidnapping, gang activity, and vigilantism, with Vetrivel's scam and abduction sparking

Jose's justice-driven response (The Hindu, 2024c). It echoes *Bheeshma Parvam*'s organized crime but contrasts *Aavesham*'s pettiness (The Hindu, 2022a; The News Minute, 2024a). Critics praise Jose's "Robin Hood vibes," romanticizing vigilantism while condemning Vetrivel, offering moral clarity absent in *Marco* (Mathrubhumi, 2024b; Malayala Manorama, 2024b). This balances *RDX*'s righteousness with a lighter tone (The News Minute, 2023a). *The News Minute* (2024a) notes its protective rather than nihilistic stance, aligning with societal values (The News Minute, 2024a). The Kerala State Youth Commission (2023) identifies interpersonal conflicts (31.3%) as a suicide factor, suggesting *Turbo*'s family-centric justice narrative may resonate with youth facing relational stressors (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

Turbo's influence on youth aged 13–25 is moderate-to-high, fueled by Mammootty's star power and its UA rating, making it accessible during festive seasons (Times of India, 2024b). Social Learning Theory suggests Jose's rewarded feats model protective aggression, appealing to loyalty instincts (Bandura, 1977; Erikson, 1968). Cultivation Theory indicates its ~8–9/hour violence normalizes duty-bound action, less intense than *RDX* but above *Kannur Squad* (Gerbner et al., 1980; The News Minute, 2023b). Desensitization is limited by humor, unlike *Marco*'s graphic impact (Carnagey et al., 2007; The Hindu, 2024c). Its "youthful energy" and "teen idol" status risk imitation, tempered by family focus (The Hindu, 2024c; Malayala Manorama, 2024b). *The News Minute* (2024a) highlights its mass appeal, potentially offering escapism for youth (The News Minute, 2024a). Kerala's suicide rate of 27.2 per lakh in 2021 exceeds the national average of 12.0, with males (79.6%) and the 18–40 age group most affected (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023; National Crime Records Bureau, 2021). Psychological distress (noted in a significant percentage), low education (62.4%), and interpersonal issues (31.3%) are prevalent, with 79.3% of victims having close family ties yet succumbing (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023). *Turbo*'s protective vigilante could model coping for youth under stress, with humor potentially mitigating negative effects, contrasting *Marco*'s intensity (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

Unlike *Aavesham*'s satire or *Marco*'s gore, *Turbo*'s stylized violence and moral vigilantism offer a moderate influence, balancing *RDX*'s intensity with humor. Compared to *Kannur Squad*'s systemic focus, it prioritizes family-driven justice, reinforcing its place in Malayalam cinema's post-COVID landscape (The News Minute, 2024a). Its impact in Kerala's youth mental health context warrants further study (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023). In conclusion, *Turbo*'s moderate violence and heroic vigilantism, softened by humor, pose a balanced youth influence, modeling

protective aggression with limited desensitization risks. Its Kerala setting and family focus enhance appeal, potentially offering escapism or coping models for youth facing distress, distinguishing it from *Marco*'s excess (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

***Kannur Squad* (2023)**

Kannur Squad, directed by Roby Varghese Raj, premiered on September 28, 2023, as a Malayalam crime thriller, grossing over ₹80 crore and affirming its commercial success (The Hindu, 2023b). Starring Mammootty as George Martin, leader of an elite police unit, it follows their cross-India pursuit of political murderers, blending realism with sacrifice. Spanning Kerala's forests to the Indo-Nepal border, it contrasts *Marco*'s brutality and *Turbo*'s humor, earning praise for its "realistic cop drama" and "inspirational" narrative (The News Minute, 2023a; Mathrubhumi, 2023a). Mammootty's "iconic appeal" sets it apart from *Aavesham*'s satire (The Hindu, 2023b). With a 2-hour-41-minute runtime (161 minutes, verified via SRT) and a UA rating, it appeals to youth aged 13–25 through its grounded storytelling.

Violence averages ~6–7 incidents per hour across its 2-hour-41-minute runtime, aligning with *Bheeshma Parvam* but below *RDX*'s ~11–12/hour and *Marco*'s ~10–12/hour, with ~15 acts (The Hindu, 2022a; The Hindu, 2023b; The Hindu, 2024a). It features controlled beatings, hangings, and threats like "corpses soon," lacking *Marco*'s gore or *Turbo*'s humor (Mathrubhumi, 2024a; The News Minute, 2024a; Bushman & Anderson, 2009). Driven by duty and revenge—George's pursuit and a personal vendetta—it contrasts *RDX*'s family focus (The News Minute, 2023a). Violence is glorified with a duty-bound overlay, unlike *Marco*'s excess (Malayala Manorama, 2023a). *New Indian Express* (2023a) notes its restrained violence serves the plot, emphasizing narrative over sensationalism (New Indian Express, 2023a). The Kerala State Youth Commission (2023) reports hanging as a prevalent suicide method (76.6%), suggesting cultural familiarity with violent imagery that *Kannur Squad* moderates (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

Criminality centers on murder, corruption, and organized crime, with political killings and bribery fueling George's mission (The Hindu, 2023b). It mirrors *Bheeshma Parvam*'s graft but contrasts *Aavesham*'s playfulness (The Hindu, 2022a; The News Minute, 2024a). Critics laud George's "noble pursuit," romanticizing duty while critiquing crime, unlike *Marco*'s unrestrained allure (Mathrubhumi, 2023a; Malayala Manorama, 2024a). This balance sets it apart from *Turbo*'s vigilantism (The News Minute, 2024a). *Indian Express* (2023a) highlights its solid yet conventional

procedural approach, reinforcing its systemic critique (Indian Express, 2023a).

Kannur Squad's influence on youth aged 13–25 is moderate, driven by Mammooty's star power and its UA-rated realism (The Hindu, 2023b). Social Learning Theory suggests George's rewarded pursuit models disciplined aggression, appealing to authority admiration (Bandura, 1977; Erikson, 1968). Cultivation Theory indicates its ~6–7/hour violence could normalize cop action, less intense than *RDX* (Gerbner et al., 1980; The News Minute, 2023b). Desensitization is minimal due to restraint, unlike *Marco*'s impact (Carnagey et al., 2007; The Hindu, 2024a). Its "iconic appeal" and "inspirational" tone risk imitation, moderated by realism, with relatable settings enhancing appeal (The Hindu, 2023b; Malayala Manorama, 2023a). It contrasts *Turbo*'s humor and *Aavesham*'s satire (The News Minute, 2024a; Mathrubhumi, 2024c). *Times of India* (2023b) rates it 3.5/5 for its effective procedural focus, suggesting youth engagement through its grounded narrative (Times of India, 2023b). Kerala's suicide rate of 27.2 per lakh in 2021 exceeds the national average of 12.0, with males (79.6%) and the 18–40 age group most affected (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023; National Crime Records Bureau, 2021). Psychological distress (significant percentage), low education (62.4%), and interpersonal conflicts (31.3%) prevail, with 79.3% of victims having close family ties yet succumbing (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023). *Kannur Squad*'s duty-driven narrative might resonate, modeling authority as coping, though its violence could normalize action for distressed youth (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

In conclusion, *Kannur Squad*'s moderate violence and heroic duty, tempered by moral clarity, pose a notable youth influence, modeling disciplined aggression with restraint. Its cop narrative distinguishes it from *Marco*'s brutality and *Bheeshma Parvam*'s gravitas, meriting further study in Malayalam cinema's post-COVID evolution given Kerala's youth mental health challenges (The News Minute, 2023a).

IV. DISCUSSION

This study of six Malayalam films offers a lens into the evolving portrayals of violence and criminality in contemporary Malayalam cinema (2021–2024) and their potential influence on young audiences aged 13–25. Grossing over ₹600 crore collectively, these films reflect a vibrant cinematic landscape shaped by genre diversity and cultural resonance, as evidenced by reviews in *The Hindu* (The Hindu, 2022a; The Hindu, 2023a; The Hindu, 2023b; The Hindu, 2024a; The Hindu, 2024b; The Hindu, 2024c). Rather than reiterating film-specific findings—such as *Marco*'s high violence frequency or *Aavesham*'s comedic

gangsterism—this discussion synthesizes overarching patterns, situates them within historical and global cinematic contexts, explores theoretical and societal implications, and reflects critically on the study's approach, contributing fresh insights to the discourse on media and youth in Kerala.

The films collectively reveal a spectrum of violence and criminality that mirrors Malayalam cinema's negotiation between spectacle and substance. Violence ranges from the intense, graphic brutality of *Marco* and *RDX* to the moderated, purpose-driven aggression of *Kannur Squad* and *Bheeshma Parvam*, with *Aavesham* and *Turbo* bridging these extremes through humor (The News Minute, 2024a). This gradient suggests a deliberate evolution: high-frequency action in *Marco* (10–12 incidents/hour) and *RDX* (11–12/hour) caters to visceral audience demands (The Hindu, 2024a; The Hindu, 2023a), while *Kannur Squad*'s restraint (6–7/hour) aligns with narrative depth (The Hindu, 2023b), reflecting a shift from action-heavy films to greater complexity (Nair, 2020). Criminality similarly spans archetypes—gangsterism in *Aavesham*, *Marco*, and *Bheeshma Parvam* contrasts vigilantism in *RDX*, *Turbo*, and *Kannur Squad*—with portrayals oscillating between romanticization and critique (Mathrubhumi, 2024a). *Marco*'s unapologetic avenger and *Aavesham*'s charming don elevate crime as aspirational (The News Minute, 2024a; Mathrubhumi, 2024a), while *Kannur Squad*'s noble cop and *Turbo*'s heroic everyman anchor it in justice (The News Minute, 2023a; The News Minute, 2024a).

This synthesis reveals a dual trend: violence and criminality are tools for both entertainment and commentary. The high-intensity films (*Marco*, *RDX*) prioritize spectacle, resonating with Kerala's youth seeking adrenaline-fueled escapism amid post-COVID uncertainties (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023), while moderated portrayals (*Bheeshma Parvam*, *Kannur Squad*) weave emotional or societal stakes, appealing to viewers valuing narrative substance (The Hindu, 2022a; The Hindu, 2023b). Humor in *Aavesham* and *Turbo* softens aggression, suggesting a hybrid approach that balances mass appeal with restraint (Malayala Manorama, 2024a; Malayala Manorama, 2024b). These patterns indicate Malayalam cinema's adaptability, catering to diverse audience segments—action enthusiasts, narrative seekers, and casual viewers—within a single cultural framework (The News Minute, 2024a).

The influence on youth emerges as a continuum, shaped by these portrayals. High-frequency, unrestrained violence (*Marco*, *RDX*) risks modeling extreme aggression, while moderated, contextualized acts (*Kannur Squad*, *Bheeshma Parvam*) suggest disciplined responses, moderated further by humor (*Turbo*, *Aavesham*) (The News Minute, 2024a;

The News Minute, 2024b). Critical reception amplifies this—*Marco*’s “ferocious appeal” and *RDX*’s “cool factor” contrast *Kannur Squad*’s “inspirational” tone and *Turbo*’s mass appeal (Mathrubhumi, 2023a)—hinting at varied youth responses, from imitation to admiration (Mathrubhumi, 2024a; The Hindu, 2023b). This continuum underscores a tension: entertainment value drives influence, but narrative intent modulates its direction, a dynamic ripe for deeper exploration (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

Situating these films within Malayalam cinema’s history reveals a lineage of violence and criminality evolving from archetype-driven action to nuanced storytelling. The 1990s saw heroes like Suresh Gopi’s *Commissioner* delivering raw justice against systemic foes, a precursor to *RDX* and *Turbo*’s vigilantism (The Hindu, 1994). The 2000s introduced gangster epics (e.g., *Chotta Mumbai*), echoed in *Aavesham* and *Bheeshma Parvam*’s underworld charm, while post-2010 “New Generation” cinema (e.g., *Kumbalangi Nights*) emphasized realism, paving the way for *Kannur Squad*’s gritty duty (Nair, 2020). This progression reflects a response to Kerala’s shifting socio-cultural landscape—economic growth, urban youth culture, and post-COVID resilience—where violence transitions from cathartic release to narrative vehicle (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

Globally, parallels emerge with Western and Asian cinema, enriching this context. *Marco*’s visceral revenge mirrors Tarantino’s *Kill Bill*, yet its Kerala rooting adds familial stakes absent in Hollywood’s individualism (The News Minute, 2024a). *RDX*’s martial action recalls Hong Kong’s *Ip Man*, but its church festival setting ties it to Kerala’s communal ethos (Mathrubhumi, 2023a). *Kannur Squad*’s cop pursuit echoes *The Departed*, though its cross-India chase reflects India’s federal complexity (The Hindu, 2023b). *Aavesham*’s comedic gangsterism aligns with *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*, yet its college backdrop localizes it (The Hindu, 2024b). *Turbo* and *Bheeshma Parvam* blend Bollywood’s mass-hero flair with Kerala’s grounded storytelling, distinguishing them from Hindi cinema’s urban bias (Malayala Manorama, 2024a). These parallels highlight Malayalam cinema’s hybridity—global influences melded with regional identity—driven by stars like Mammooty, whose “iconic” versatility bridges eras (The Hindu, 2023b).

Culturally, the films reflect Kerala’s duality: a progressive state with traditional roots. *Bheeshma Parvam*’s Kochi underworld and *RDX*’s festival clashes mirror urban-rural tensions, while *Kannur Squad*’s policing critiques real-world law enforcement debates (Nair, 2020). *Turbo*’s Idukki hero and *Aavesham*’s Bengaluru shift tap into

Kerala’s diaspora and youth mobility (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023). This localization—unlike Bollywood’s metropolitan focus—enhances relatability, amplifying influence on Kerala’s 13–25 demographic, who see their lives reflected in these narratives (The News Minute, 2024a).

Theoretically, these films engage Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), Cultivation Theory (Gerbner et al., 1980), and desensitization research (Carnagey et al., 2007) in nuanced ways. Bandura’s modeling suggests *Marco*’s unrestrained aggression and *RDX*’s martial feats could inspire imitation among youth navigating identity crises (Erikson, 1968), while *Turbo*’s protective vigilantism and *Kannur Squad*’s disciplined duty model socially sanctioned responses (The Hindu, 2024c; Mathrubhumi, 2023a). *Aavesham*’s comedic flair and *Bheeshma Parvam*’s authoritative restraint moderate this, suggesting context shapes behavior adoption (The Hindu, 2024b; Mathrubhumi, 2022a). Cultivation Theory posits *Marco* and *RDX*’s high violence normalize aggression more than *Kannur Squad*’s restraint, with *Turbo* and *Aavesham*’s humor diluting long-term effects (The News Minute, 2024b; Malayala Manorama, 2024a). Desensitization risks peak with *Marco*’s gore, lessen with *RDX*’s stylization, and minimize with *Bheeshma Parvam*’s narrative focus, highlighting violence type’s role (Carnagey et al., 2007; The Hindu, 2024a).

Societally, these portrayals intersect with Kerala’s youth culture and media landscape. *Marco*’s brutality and *RDX*’s action may fuel aggression in a state with high suicide rates (27.2 per lakh in 2021) and youth distress (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023; National Crime Records Bureau, 2021), while *Kannur Squad*’s duty reinforces trust in institutions amid policing debates (Nair, 2020). *Turbo* and *Aavesham*’s humor could bolster resilience, countering violence’s edge (Malayala Manorama, 2024a), yet *Bheeshma Parvam*’s gangster allure risks glamorizing underworld life in urbanizing Kochi (The Hindu, 2022a). These dynamics suggest a dual impact: reinforcing cultural values (family, duty) while challenging social norms (vigilantism, crime), necessitating media literacy to mitigate risks (Potter, 2012). Kerala’s high literacy and cinema engagement amplify this influence, with OTT platforms extending reach beyond theaters (The News Minute, 2024a).

Policy implications emerge—e.g., integrating media education to decode *Marco*’s allure or *Kannur Squad*’s duty, countering modeling risks (Bandura, 1977). Youth programs could leverage *Turbo*’s resilience themes, while regulators might monitor *RDX*’s vigilante appeal, balancing entertainment with social good (Kerala State Youth

Commission, 2023). This positions Malayalam cinema as both a mirror and shaper of Kerala's youth psyche, warranting further study (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

Reflecting on this study, the qualitative, thematic approach captures depth—violence's spectrum, criminality's archetypes, influence's nuances—yet its subjectivity limits generalizability (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A quantitative supplement (e.g., violence counts vs. youth surveys) could enhance precision, though time constraints favored depth over breadth (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The focus on six films reflects mainstream trends but omits niche genres (e.g., *Minnal Murali*'s superheroism), a deliberate choice to prioritize cultural impact (The Hindu, 2024a). Gender representation—a gap in these male-centric narratives—merits critique; female roles (e.g., Elsa in *Bheeshma Parvam*) are marginal, echoing Mulvey's (1975) gaze critique, suggesting a future lens (Mulvey, 1975).

Future research could explore OTT's role—e.g., *Aavesham*'s streaming reach vs. *Marco*'s theatrical shock—using viewership data (Potter, 2012). Longitudinal studies on Kerala youth post-exposure (e.g., aggression after *RDX*, duty after *Kannur Squad*) could test theoretical predictions (Bandura, 1977). Comparative analyses with Tamil or Bollywood cinema (e.g., *Vikram*, *Jawan*) might reveal regional distinctions, while gender-focused studies could unpack female agency in violence narratives (Potter, 2012). This study thus opens a dialogue on Malayalam cinema's role (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

V. CONCLUSION

This study of six Malayalam films—*Aavesham* (2024), *Marco* (2024), *Bheeshma Parvam* (2022), *RDX: Robert Dony Xavier* (2023), *Turbo* (2024), and *Kannur Squad* (2023)—explores the dynamic interplay of violence and criminality in contemporary Malayalam cinema (2021–2024) and their potential influence on youth aged 13–25. Collectively grossing over ₹600 crore, these films underscore their commercial potency and cultural resonance, as evidenced by critical reviews (The Hindu, 2022a; The Hindu, 2023a; The Hindu, 2023b; The Hindu, 2024a; The Hindu, 2024b; The Hindu, 2024c). The analysis reveals a violence spectrum from *Marco*'s graphic brutality to *Kannur Squad*'s measured realism, mirrored by criminal portrayals ranging from romanticized gangsterism to righteous vigilantism. Through synthesis, historical and global contextualization, and examination of theoretical and societal implications, this study offers a nuanced perspective on how these films shape Kerala's young audiences.

Malayalam cinema's adaptability shines through its ability to balance spectacle and substance, engaging diverse youth demographics. High-intensity violence in *Marco* and *RDX* captivates thrill-seekers craving escapism, while *Aavesham* and *Turbo* leverage humor to widen appeal, and *Bheeshma Parvam* and *Kannur Squad* deliver narrative depth for those prizing meaning over excess (Mathrubhumi, 2024a). Criminality—glamorized in *Aavesham*'s charismatic don and *Marco*'s tragic avenger, yet grounded in *Turbo*'s heroic everyman and *Kannur Squad*'s dutiful cop—reflects Kerala's socio-cultural duality, merging progressive aspirations with traditional values (Nair, 2020). This versatility fuels a varied influence: *Marco*'s unrestrained aggression poses the greatest risk of modeling behavior, tempered by *Turbo*'s comedic lens and *Kannur Squad*'s moral framework, as illuminated by Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) and Cultivation Theory (Gerbner et al., 1980). Critical reception underscores this spectrum, juxtaposing *Marco*'s “ferocious appeal” with *Kannur Squad*'s “inspirational” ethos (The News Minute, 2023a).

Positioned as a cultural artifact, Malayalam cinema both mirrors and molds Kerala's youth, evolving from 1990s action archetypes to 2020s nuanced tales, paralleling global cinematic trends—such as Tarantino's visceral intensity or Hong Kong's martial artistry—while retaining a regional identity through local settings and stars like Mammooty (The Hindu, 2022a). Societally, these films straddle entertainment and influence, necessitating media literacy to mitigate desensitization risks (Carnagey et al., 2007) while amplifying resilience and duty as positive takeaways (Malayala Manorama, 2024a). This duality demands attention from educators, policymakers, and filmmakers to harness cinema's potential responsibly, particularly given Kerala's youth mental health challenges (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

The study's qualitative approach, while rich in thematic depth, limits generalizability, and its male-centric focus overlooks female perspectives, echoing Mulvey's (1975) critique (Mulvey, 1975). Future inquiries could probe OTT platforms' reach—such as *Aavesham*'s streaming impact—or track longitudinal youth responses, incorporating quantitative data (Potter, 2012). Comparative analyses with Tamil or Bollywood cinema could further highlight regional nuances. Ultimately, this study affirms Malayalam cinema's power to entertain, challenge, and shape, providing a robust foundation for understanding its role in Kerala's cultural and social fabric, with broader implications for media scholarship and youth development in a digital era (Kerala State Youth Commission, 2023).

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From Roots to Routes: Migration and Identity in Indian Diaspora Literature

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Abstract— Migration has been one of the defining experiences of the Indian diaspora, reshaping notions of identity, belonging, and cultural memory. Indian diaspora literature captures the complex transition from 'roots', symbolizing origin and homeland, to 'routes', representing movement, displacement, and transnational existence. In Indian diasporic literature, the act of crossing borders is rarely just a physical journey; it is a psychological transformation. For writers of the Indian diaspora, "identity" is not a fixed label but a fluid process of negotiation between the desh (homeland) and the videsh (host land). This paper examines how Indian diasporic writers negotiate identity in the context of migration, cultural hybridity, and alienation. Drawing on theoretical insights from diaspora studies and postcolonial criticism, and analyzing selected works by writers such as Jhumpa Lahiri, V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, and Bharati Mukherjee, the paper argues that Indian diaspora literature reflects identity as fluid, hybrid, and continually reconstructed across spaces.



Keywords— Indian Diaspora, Migration, Identity, Hybridity, Transnationalism, Post colonial, Fluid

I. INTRODUCTION

The term Indian diaspora refers to the large community of people of Indian origin living outside the geographical boundaries of India. Spread across continents such as Asia, Africa, Europe, North America, the Caribbean, and Oceania, the Indian diaspora is one of the largest and most diverse diasporas in the world. It represents a complex history of migration, cultural exchange, adaptation, and identity formation. Historically, the Indian diaspora can be traced back to ancient times through trade, commerce, and cultural contacts. Indian merchants, scholars, and religious teachers travelled to Southeast Asia, Central Asia, and parts of Africa, leaving lasting cultural influences. However, the modern Indian diaspora largely emerged during the colonial period. Under British rule, Indians were taken as indentured labourers to plantations in countries such as Fiji, Mauritius, Trinidad, Guyana, South Africa, and Sri Lanka. These migrants faced harsh working conditions but gradually established stable communities abroad.

In the post-independence period, a new phase of migration began. Educated professionals, students, and

skilled workers moved to countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia in search of better economic opportunities. This phase is often described as voluntary migration, unlike the forced or semi-forced migration of the colonial era. As a result, the Indian diaspora today includes people from varied socio-economic, linguistic, and religious backgrounds. Culturally, the Indian diaspora has played a significant role in preserving and promoting Indian traditions while also adapting to host societies. Festivals such as Diwali, Holi, and Navratri are celebrated across the globe, and Indian languages, cuisine, music, and cinema have gained international recognition. At the same time, diasporic communities experience cultural hybridity, negotiating between their Indian heritage and the values of the host nation. This negotiation often leads to questions of identity, belonging, and home. The Indian diaspora has also made notable contributions to the economic and political life of host countries. Many people of Indian origin have achieved success in fields such as science, technology, medicine, business, literature, and politics. Remittances sent by overseas Indians contribute

significantly to India's economy, strengthening ties between India and its diaspora. In literature and cultural studies, the Indian diaspora has become an important subject of study. Diasporic writers explore themes such as displacement, nostalgia, cultural conflict, generational differences, and identity crisis. Through their works, they give voice to the emotional and psychological experiences of migrants and their descendants.

Migration has historically been central to the Indian experience, from colonial indenture to contemporary globalization. The movement of Indians across continents has produced a rich body of diaspora literature that explores the psychological, cultural, and social consequences of displacement. Indian diaspora literature articulates the tension between "roots," associated with homeland and cultural origin, and "routes," signifying journeys, migration, and transnational mobility.

The phrase 'from roots to routes' highlights the shift from fixed identities to dynamic, evolving ones shaped by movement and cross-cultural encounters. In the study of the Indian diaspora and migration, it represents a shift in how we understand identity. It moves away from the idea that identity is fixed to a single place of origin (roots) and toward the idea that identity is shaped by the journey, movement, and ongoing cultural exchanges (routes). This concept was largely popularized by the cultural theorist Paul Gilroy in his seminal work *The Black Atlantic* (1993) and later expanded upon by scholars like James Clifford and Arjun Appadurai.

In Indian diasporic literature, migration is portrayed not just as a change of address, but as a violent or transformative psychological event that reshapes a person's world. Writers often use migration as a lens to explore the "fractured self"—the idea that once you leave your home, you can never truly return, nor can you ever fully arrive in the new land. This paper examines how Indian diaspora literature portrays migration as a transformative process that complicates identity and belonging.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: DIASPORA AND IDENTITY

Diasporic Studies (or Diaspora Studies) is an interdisciplinary academic field that examines the movement, settlement, and cultural evolution of dispersed populations. It investigates how people maintain connections to a real or "imagined" homeland while navigating the complexities of living in a host country. The field has evolved from focusing solely on "victim diasporas" (like the Jewish or Armenian experiences) to a much broader analysis of global mobility, identity, and transnationalism. Diaspora studies emphasize dispersion,

memory, and the negotiation of identity across borders. Scholars such as Stuart Hall view identity not as a stable essence but as a "production" that is always in process. His seminal view on identity challenges the traditional "essentialist" notion of a fixed, ancestral self by proposing that identity is an ongoing production rather than a completed fact. He distinguishes between identity as "being"—a shared sense of oneness rooted in common history—and identity as "becoming," a fluid process shaped by the interventions of history, culture, and power. For Hall, identity is never simply "discovered"; it is constituted within representation, meaning we construct who we are through the stories and discourses we use to describe ourselves. By emphasizing positionality and hybridity, Hall suggests that the migrant identity is a "Third Space" of constant transformation, where the self is perpetually redefined through its relationship with the "Other" and the specific historical context in which it speaks.

Similarly, Homi Bhabha in his influential work *The Location of Culture* (1994), introduces hybridity to describe the complex, "in-between" space that emerges when different cultures—specifically those of the colonizer and the colonized—meet and interact. His concept of hybridity underscores the creation of new cultural forms in the "third space" between cultures. Rather than seeing migration or colonization as a simple process of one culture dominating another, Bhabha argues that the encounter creates something entirely new and "contaminated," which disrupts the authority of the dominant culture. In postcolonial theory, Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity is a direct challenge to the idea that any culture is "pure" or "original." Instead of viewing the relationship between a colonizer and the colonized as a simple binary (us vs. them), Bhabha argues that the interaction between the two creates something entirely new and unstable.

In Indian diaspora literature, identity emerges as fragmented and plural, shaped by nostalgia for the homeland and adaptation to the host culture. Migration thus becomes both a loss and an opportunity for redefinition.

III. MIGRATION AND THE LOSS OF ROOTS

First-generation migrants often experience an intense, visceral attachment to their homeland that is qualitatively different from that of their children. For the first generation, the homeland represents a fixed point of origin. Their identities were formed in a world where language, social status, and cultural rituals were "given" and unquestioned. In a new country, they often face "otherization" or a loss of social status (e.g., a professional in the homeland becomes a laborer in the host land). Clinging to the homeland is a way to maintain a sense of

self-esteem and continuity. The Indian diasporic literature frequently portrays this nostalgic state of mind, cultural anxiety, and alienation as migrants struggle to preserve their original traditions in unfamiliar environments. Homi Bhabha emphasizes that language is not just for communication; it is a "home." For first-generation migrants, the mother tongue carries nuances of humor, emotion, and history that the host language cannot capture. First-generation migrants often live in a state of "unhomeliness" (Bhabha's *unheimlich*), where they physically reside in the new country but mentally and emotionally "live in the past." This is why first-generation migrants are often more "traditional" than people currently living in the homeland. They "freeze" their culture at the moment of their departure, using food, religious rituals, and clothing as a defensive shield against the alienating forces of the host culture.

In Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*, Ashima Ganguly's longing for India and her sense of isolation in America exemplify the migrant's emotional displacement. The homeland exists as a memory rather than a physical space, emphasizing the pain of severed roots. Ashima's longing for her homeland is a foundational example of what Homi Bhabha calls "unhomeliness." For Ashima, the "loss of roots" is not a single event but a prolonged state of being "out of sorts" in a foreign land.

Similarly, V.S. Naipaul's works reflect the psychological consequences of displacement among diasporic communities in the Caribbean, where cultural roots are fragmented due to historical migration and colonialism. In the fiction of V.S. Naipaul, displacement is rendered as a profound existential crisis where the postcolonial subject is trapped in a "void," unable to reclaim an ancestral past or fully inhabit a colonial future. This state reflects Homi Bhabha's concept of unhomeliness, particularly in *A House for Mr. Biswas*, where the protagonist's lifelong struggle to own property is a desperate attempt to anchor a "rootless" identity inherited from a history of indentured labor. Naipaul's characters often resort to mimicry, adopting the manners of the colonizer to escape their alienation; however, unlike Bhabha's view of mimicry as a subversive tool of resistance, Naipaul often portrays it as a hollow performance that leaves the individual fragmented. Ultimately, as seen in *The Enigma of Arrival*, displacement is only resolved through the creation of a Third Space of writing, where the migrant moves from a search for fixed "roots" to an acceptance of their complex "routes," finding a home not in geography, but in the act of narration.

Routes and the Formation of Hybrid Identity

While the loss of roots causes alienation, migration also opens up new routes of identity formation. While first-generation migrants often struggle with "cultural bereavement," the second generation—children born or raised in the host country—becomes the primary architects of what Homi Bhabha calls cultural hybridity. For them, hybridity is not a choice or a loss, but an organic way of life. They often negotiate multiple cultural affiliations, leading to hybrid identities.

In Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*, Gogol Ganguli is the quintessential representation of the generational shift from the "uprooted" migrant to the "hybrid" citizen. While his parents, Ashoke and Ashima, live their lives through the lens of cultural bereavement—constantly looking back at a lost Calcutta—Gogol's struggle is defined by the tension of being "born across" two worlds. Unlike his parents, he does not experience India as home but as a cultural inheritance. His identity is shaped by American society as well as Indian traditions, reflecting the diasporic condition of in-betweenness.

Bharati Mukherjee's fiction offers a more radical and often more celebratory perspective. She often celebrates migration not as a state of loss or a "half-life" but a violent and exhilarating process of self-reinvention. Bharati Mukherjee offers a more radical and often more celebratory perspective. She famously distinguishes herself from writers like V.S. Naipaul (who focuses on the "wound" of displacement) by embracing the "melting pot" of America as a site of total transformation. Her protagonists embrace cultural transformation, viewing identity as fluid rather than fixed.

Language, Memory, and Cultural Negotiation

Language plays a crucial role in expressing diasporic identity. English becomes both a medium of expression and a site of cultural negotiation. Indian diaspora writers often incorporate indigenous words, cultural references, and memories of the homeland, creating a hybrid literary language. Memory functions as a bridge between roots and routes. Food, rituals, and festivals become symbolic anchors of identity, preserving cultural continuity in diasporic spaces. Literature thus becomes a repository of cultural memory that resists complete assimilation. Indian diaspora literature challenges the idea of a singular national identity. Instead, it presents belonging as multiple and shifting. Salman Rushdie's works, particularly *Imaginary Homelands*, emphasize the fragmented nature of diasporic memory and the impossibility of returning to an unaltered homeland. The diasporic subject occupies a liminal space, belonging neither entirely to the homeland nor fully to the host nation.

This condition, though unsettling, allows for creative and cultural hybridity.

IV. CONCLUSION

Despite the success stories, migration often involves a struggle for Identity. This is a central theme in Indian Diasporic Literature, where characters navigate the "in-between" space of being too Indian for their host country but too Westernized for their homeland. Indian diaspora literature vividly illustrates the movement from roots to routes as a defining feature of migrant identity. Through narratives of displacement, nostalgia, and cultural negotiation, diasporic writers reveal identity as fluid, hybrid, and continuously evolving. Migration disrupts fixed notions of belonging but also enables the creation of new cultural spaces and identities. As globalization intensifies migration, Indian diaspora literature remains a vital site for understanding the complexities of identity in a transnational world. In conclusion, the Indian diaspora is a dynamic and influential global community shaped by history, migration, and cultural interaction. It represents both continuity and change—maintaining connections with India while evolving in diverse global contexts. The study of the Indian diaspora helps in understanding globalization, multiculturalism, and the changing nature of identity in the modern world.

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Not Lost in Translation: Culture, Identity and Odia Issues in the Translations of Himansu Sekhar Mohapatra

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Abstract— *Translation involves both the human factor and the language. By human factor we mean the political, social, gender-based identity along with the ethical, moral judgments. The moral stands stem from person's experience of various socio-cultural phenomenon and events. When such stands lead to stereotypical mindset on the parts of translator, the norms and regulations of translation come handy to save the day. As culture and norms are two different domains there are instances of conflict between them. A good translator always strikes a balance between the two. Of late literary translation has been a vehicle for transmission of own culture, identity and issues. Translation is being used as a metaphorical passport for transporting the indigenous culture from margin to the centre through text. A study of translated works from 1995s till 2010 in Odisha saw a surge of exotropic translation when more than 100 texts were translated from Odia to English. Himansu S. Mohapatra rightly points out, "there are so many ways in which translation can mirror the layered nature of culture." (Mohapatra, 91-92). This paper synoptically analyses the corpus of translation done by Himansu Sekhar Mohapatra and how as a contemporary translator he values his own culture and establishes it in global forum. Being a professor of English he is cautious of norms and principles of translation, at the same time as an Odia he goes extra mile to preserve the original meanings, emotions and ethos not being lost in translation.*



Keywords— *Translation, Culture, Identities, Odia Issues*

Introduction

The evolution of the Odia identity, rooted in the rich cultural tapestry of the Indian state of Odisha, has been profoundly shaped by a myriad of social movements spanning linguistic, cultural, political, and social spheres. These movements, each with its unique contours, have not only fortified the distinctiveness of the Odia identity but have also been instrumental in fostering a sense of unity, pride, and resilience among the people. The linguistic movement, which gained momentum in the early 20th century, sought the recognition and promotion of the Odia language, playing a pivotal role in shaping a linguistic identity. Translation was a part of part of the linguistic movement for which some texts got translated from different Indian languages into Odia which unequivocally helped the Odia movement in early nineties. These translations include Krittibas Nanda Sharma's translation of

Mahatma Gandhi's Hind Swaraj which was published by Utkal Sahitya Press, Cuttack in the year 1921 and the publication of translation of a book on the freedom movement by Gopal Krishna Gokhael in 1923 reinforced the spirit of freedom of Odisha from Bengali dominance.

Earlier translation in Odisha used to be a form of cultural practice. However, of late the *who*, the *what*, the *for whom* and the *how* has changed. For some translators, translation has been a political rhetoric. They glorify the politics involved at the cost of one's ethnicity, identity and culture so jeopardizing one's civilization at large. Unbiased and apolitical translation is the requirement of the day in order to restore the lost glory.

Resurgence of Translation: Furthering Odia identity

Before delving into principal argument of the paper let's have a glimpse of history of translation in

Odisha. The resurgence of translation within the context of Odisha has been a transformative force, intricately weaving the threads of tradition and heritage into the fabric of the Odia identity through the text. At the heart of this resurgence were endeavors to resurrect and preserve classical and antique documents that had, over time, faced the threat of neglect. Literary luminaries, artists, and enthusiasts played a pivotal role in breathing new life into them ensuring their continuity and relevance in contemporary times. This revival not only preserved literary and cultural treasures but also laid the foundation for a distinct cultural identity that resonates with the people of Odisha. It enriched the literary landscape and contributed to a sense of linguistic pride, reinforcing the Odia identity through written expression. Hence translation played a pivotal role in preservation, circulation and dissemination of Odia knowledge system creating a harmonious blend of the old and the new.

A concise history of translation in Odisha would acquaint us with the rise of translation in Odisha. Prior to 1867, some four works of translation into Oriya had been published. Three of these were Christian religious text and the fourth one was an administrative text. The Period from 1867-1868 can be considered as the period of resurgence in translation. There was obvious growth in number of texts getting translated. To quote translator and translation historian Paul St-Pierre, this period saw the surge of translation, “a total of eleven translations into Oriya appeared, all in Orissa. They focused on the principal concerns and interests of the time: education, religion and administration.” (St-Pierre, 58) These translated texts were chosen as the text books for the schools. So much so that Fakir Mohan Senapati the famous 19th century writer was awarded a sum of thousand rupees for his translation of Bharat barshar Itihas (A History of India).

Exotropic Translations in Odisha

The popularity of exotropic translation is often attributed to the publication of English translation of classic Odia novel of Fakir Mohan Senapati “Chha Mana Atha Guntha” into *Six Acres and a Third* in the year 2005 and published by University of California Press. Since then such translations flourished in Odisha. The renowned translators include Jatindra K Nayak, Bikram K Das, Snehaprava Das, Lipipuspa Nayak, Mary Mohanty, Ashok Mohanty, Supriya Kar, Kamalakant Mohapatra to name a few along with Paul St. Piere as a collaborator with some of them. They have undertaken the translations of often regarded greatest Odia classics like *Chha Mana Atha Guntha*, *Mamu*, *Prayaschita*, *Paraja*, *Amrutara Santan*, *Dana Pani*, *Dadi Budha*, *Jantra Rudha*, *Desha Kala Patra* etc. These classics have established Odia literature in global forum- its identity, variety and magnitude. These works have secured unique

place in Indian academia under the banner either of post colonial studies or of Indian classics in translations. Scholars take immense benefit in their research from these translated texts. Some translators are even obsessive to translate the already translated canonical works. There is no harm in doing so, in finding out the gaps in earlier translations but the attempt is directed to gain immediate fame and recognition these canonical texts offer. However these canonical texts do not form the entirety of Odia literature. There are still some worthy texts unexplored and thus buried in the course of time without getting an outlet to flourish. In this critical juncture where some precious non-canonical texts have received little attention from the translators, hence marginalized, the intervention of Himansu Sekhar Mohapatra as a translator provides an attempt to holistic understanding of Odia literature vis-a-vis Odia identity and culture.

Translator as torch bearer: The Translations of Himansu Sekhar Mohapatra

Translation is a matter of personal choice. One can ascribe many reasons to selection of a text for translation. Certain situation compels the translators to take up the case. Translator selects a text at particular point in time, which is considered culturally or socially significant, or canonical. Sometimes he values a text due to his personal equation with the author or as a part of assignment offered to him by any agency. A real translator, a torch bearer of translation becomes the voice of good but marginalized texts. He often transcends the shackles and establishes an important text through his translation which does not form the part of cannon. By way of inserting marginal texts into the cultural space of the centre, a true translator preserves the identity, transmits the culture and raises the Odia issues.

In this critical juncture, Himansu Sekhar Mohapatra appears in the field of translation as a translator in the year 2019 with the publication of the novel *Basanti* by Oxford University Press. Although he is not new to the field of translation- as a professor he has produced some PhD scholars in this field and has published research papers in renowned international journals but new as a translator, his first translation became an instant hit for the choice of the unique collaborative novel written by nine writers. Of course the theme of 19th century feminism grabbed the positive attention of readers and reviewers.

The corpus of Mohapatra’s translation is not very large; however, they are exclusive from the point of view of theme and choice of subject matter. Some of his significant translations in collaboration with Paul St-Pierre include *Basanti: Writing the New Woman* (2019) written by Annada Shankar Ray, et al., *Letters to Jorina: A Novel* (2021) by Ganeswar Mishra, *Battles of Our Own* (2022) by Jagadish

Mohanty, *Following My Heart* (2023) by Jyotindra Mohan Joardar and his own translation include *The Life and Times of Banka Harichandan* (2023) written originally in Odia by Dipti Ranjan Pattanaik.

In this paper I would analyse the above novels one by one what made Mohapatra to undertake the above projects. Giving a bird's eye view of the plot we would discover the latent qualities of the texts that became head turner for the translator.

Basanti: Writing the New Woman (Basanti)

Basanti is a revolutionary collaborative novel written by nine authors (Annada Shankar Roy et al.) with a challenging theme of women's emancipation set in a conservative 19th century Odia society. The eponymous character becomes vocal for gender equality and scribes it in an Odia magazine causing discontent with her husband Debartra and eventual separation. Somdatta Mandal rightly points out, "Basanti, the protagonist of the novel is a misfit in conservative, pre-Independence rural Odisha not only because she reads and writes on her own choice, but also because she marries out of love a man not belonging to her own caste and in spite of confronting regular conflicts with her conservative mother-in law, manages to run a girls' school in the village."

This radical experimentation of novel writing and choice of unconventional theme of women's emancipation through education drew the attention of the translator to work on such great but marginalized text. By giving life to Basanti in English, the translator furthers the Odia women's issue during 19th century and brings it to global lime light.

Letters to Jorina (Chithi Jorina Pain)

Letters to Jorina is a chronicle of East-West divide. The author (Ganeswar Mishra) who is known for creating characters rooted in Odia society and culture has certainly introduced Alok Das, a cosmopolitan protagonist who negotiates the East-West divide. He is caught between the two worlds of societal and cultural dissimilarity. He does not believe in the idea of East and West as portrayed by Kipling in his ballad. He mourns the loss of his native land Odisha when in England and feels nostalgic of his life in England when in Odisha. Jayashree Mishra rightly points out in the review of the novel, "Told informally through eleven letters that Alok writes to his lady friend in England, Jorina McCarthy, the novel charmingly outlines the prospects and problems of our postcolonial condition."

By undertaking this text for translation Mohapatra and St-Pierre duo have done justice to it. For the translators the experience the author was undergoing was like a déjà vu. H.S. Mohapatra was a doctoral student in England and spent his life there for more than four years and Paul is a

Canadian Professor who travels almost every year to Odisha for translation since last thirty years, considers Odisha his second home.

To quote Snehaprava Das from her review

"But a work like this is in need of global visibility... The translated version reads like an original work in English. If translation is believed to be an act of linguistic bridge-building for the sake of transformational cross-cultural journey, then *Letters to Jorina* is a fine example of such a bridge."

Battles of Our Own (Nija Nija Panipath)

The novel **Battles of Our Own** claims to be an industrial novel. It portrays the life in Tarbahar colliery. Much like Western Industrial novels where the characters working in industries are under paid and dwell in cheap dilapidated buildings or in slums, the protagonist of *Battles*, Pradyumna Mishra secures a job by purchasing the identity of a tribal named Samaru Khadia and lives miserably in the house of his relative. The novel dramatizes the unholy nexus between coal mafias, management, trade union leaders and politicians leading to huge corruption and instability in the colliery.

When the proposal of translating Nija Nija Panipath was sent to Penguin, Ananya Bhatia, the editor of the project accepted it by saying; "Dear Professor Mohapatra and Professor St- Pierre, I am pleased to inform you that your proposal for the English translation of *Nija Nija Panipatha* by Jagadish Mohanty has been accepted. It is a unique and beautifully written novel that dwells on important issues and themes. It will give us great pleasure to add this significant work of Odia literature to our translation list."

The excellence of the novel in translation, *Battles of Our Own* is acknowledged by the writer and translator Jenny Bhatt who "selects five key works of South Asian literature, all historical novels available in English translation, that showcase the richness and diversity of the region's lesser known languages: from a modernist classic decrying the depredations of the coal mining industry to a 'loose, baggy monster' of a Victorian novel exploring utopian ideals."

To add another feather to the success story of the novel *Battles of Our Own* Scroll. in on the occasion of International Mother Language day offers a list of 15 Indian Language books to read in translation, and this novel features in 5th serial.

Following My Heart (Manua)

Folllowing My Heart is a translation of an Odia memoir - Manua - written by Jyotindra Mohan

Joardar. While discovering the text the translator was moved by the writing style, uninterrupted flow of images, and experiences of the writer in old capital of Odisha Cuttack or in the new capital during 1950s which have been neatly written and delivered to the public. The translator speaks about the book in the blurb,

“This account is simple and natural, informative and detailed, not the tale of successes alone but of a life lived in all its complexity, in which both women and men participate and in which day-to-day life is described in full. The author, Jyotirindra Mohan Joardar, who lived from 1914 to 2011, movingly recounts his many interests and passions, such as swimming, classical music, chess, and translation.”

Joardar may not be an acclaimed Odia writer but this memoir for the involved intensity, passion and writing style is worth to be translated and brought to attention of English reading public.

The Life and Times of Banka Harichandan (Sandigdha Saishab)

A coming of age narrative set in provincial town of Cuttack and Choudwar *The Life and Times of Banka Harichandan* tells the growing up of the protagonist Banka Harichandan through the conservative mindset of Odia society. He is caught between social norms of morality and immorality. As a child he wants to explore the freedom by hanging out with friends, smoking cigarette or watching movie but not at the cost of family honour. He refrains from the above adolescent enviable activities his friends practice. Mitra Samal rightly points out in her review “It is a gripping narrative of a typical Indian middleclass household, with its strict observances of ordinances for a rather befuddled boy Banka and I could very much relate to it.”

Choosing *Sandigdha Saishab*, a composite novel, to translate is definitely commendable job on the part of translator as the novel permeates through socio cultural membranes of present day Odisha where in the growth of an Odia bildung has succinctly been portrayed.

CONCLUSION

With the quality of translation being assured as top publishing houses like Penguin, Oxford, Simon and Schusters showing interest in his translation, I would conclude that as a translator, Himansu S Mohapatra, is becoming a trend setter in Odisha translation circle offering a complete representation of Odia literature, culture, society and identity without having any prejudice for any texts. At last, I can conclude that H S Mohapatra not being biased by any influence, luring or easy popularity does his job

dutifully as a translator for holistic depiction of Odianess, thus, he is ‘not lost in translation’.

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Reimagining Selfhood: Identity and Modernity in the Postcolonial Context of Girish Karnad's Hayavadana

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Abstract— Girish Karnad, an Indian Jnanpith awardee playwright, played a pivotal role in the evolution of modern Indian playwriting in Kannada. This paper delves into the intricacies of identity and modernity in Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana* while examining it from a postcolonial lens. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the fragmentation of selfhood, challenging traditional notions of identity in the face of modernity. The play subtly uses myths and tradition to highlight the impact of colonialism on identity formation, particularly in postcolonial societies like India. Through a postcolonial framework, the paper examines how *Hayavadana* reflects the ongoing search for a cohesive identity in a world shaped by both colonial past and modern pressures. This research further looks into the ways through which Karnad ponders over the meaning of existence and identity in his play, while questioning the parameters of modernity.



Keywords— Identity, modernity, Girish Karnad, post-colonialism, myth

I. INTRODUCTION

Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana* (1971) was a spectacular play based on a tale from the *Vetalpanchavimshika* and inspired by Thomas Mann's *The Transposed Heads*. Molded in the world of Indian mythology and folklore, the play draws from the tales of the *Kathasaritsagara* and explores the conflict between the mind and the body through a unique portrayal that blends traditional storytelling with modern theatrical techniques. At the heart of the play is the story of Devadatta, Kapila, and Padmini whose intertwined fates result in a chaotic love triangle all the while exposing the reality of ending human desires and the greed for more. The play simultaneously discusses the disjunctive life of *Hayavadana*- a man with the head of a horse. The quest for completeness and an acceptable identity is thoroughly explored through the metanarrative utilized by Karnad in *Hayavadana*. This paper aims to establish a connection between the pursuit of an acceptable identity and the world of post-colonialism.

II. POST-COLONIAL THEORY

Postcolonial theory delves into the literature produced in countries that were once colonies, usually dealing with themes such as national crisis, a struggle for independence, and a quest for identity. Postcolonial theory became part of the critical toolbox in the 1970s, and many practitioners credit Edward Said's book *Orientalism* as being the founding work. (*University of Washington*)

Literature of the colonial states aims to express their identity and realities of the colonized world. One of the important terms of postcolonial literature is "hybridity" which refers to the intermingling of the colonized country's culture with that of the colonizers. Hybridity, as per Homi K Bhabha, is the refusal against acceptance of a monolithic identity.

III. DISCUSSION

The play opens with an invocation of Lord Ganesha to seek his blessings for a successful performance. In the first few minutes of the performance, Bhagvata sings verses in praise of the lord-*O single-tusked destroyer of incompleteness, we pay homage to you and start our play.*

Karnad clearly establishes the idea that the play deals with the notion of incompleteness as a major theme. In the world of post-colonialism, especially with the looming threat of war and violence, an invocation to God serves as a method of bringing hope. However, in the same prayer, Karnad acknowledges the incompleteness in the lord as well and it is not unique to humans but a trait present even in God. The search for wholeness isn't comprehensible by mortals and beyond the understanding of humans.

The play begins with Bhagvata and Nata talking about Hayavadana who is a hybrid of human and horse. Even though his characteristics are of a theriomorph, he has full awareness of contemporary rational thoughts which is displayed in the first act. When Nata, the actor, approaches Bhagvata about a strange creature that he had witnessed, he confesses that this beastly figure instructed him to keep the roadsides clean. Karnad expresses that such concerns are often dismissed by humans, however, Hayavadana cannot ignore them. Even though he is deemed socially unacceptable, his concern for society surpasses the care that humans, who consider themselves superior, have for the world they live in. From a postcolonial perspective, this incident shows that due to the terror of colonialism, humans have lost their connection with nature, which has also shifted their priorities in this modern world. The colonialists' exploitation of nature has, in turn, influenced the natives, resulting in a similar disregard for the environment.

Hayavadana also acts as the representative of hybridity, as defined in the post-colonial context. Hybridity in this sense is all about the intermingling of the colonial culture with the culture of the colonized. Hayavadana embodies this hybridity. He is associated with the Indian culture, as a mythical hybrid horse-headed man, but he attempts to adopt the modern post-colonial ideas to become a truly hybrid creature who is accustomed to the current workings of the world. This reflects the struggles of the postcolonial societies to negotiate their traditional identities with the expectations of the colonizers.

In postcolonial Indian society, the influence of colonialism has boosted the role of fate and destiny. With the poundage of colonial legacy casting a shadow over their lives, people have increasingly abandoned forward-thinking and have left their futures to chance. As Bhagvata says to Hayavadana,

Hayavadana, what's written on our foreheads cannot be altered.

Hayavadana, however, refuses to accept his fate and alter the lines of destiny. He turns to religion like any other post-colonial human would've done in times of adversity, and visits every other religious place such as Banaras, Dargah

of Khwaja Yusuf, and the Grotto of Virgin Mary, but to his dismay, nothing changed. This mirrors the experiences of the people who retained their faith in God and went to every possible length in religion to escape the world of suffering and identity quest.

Humans are social creatures who rely on and thrive in the presence of others. (*Wasi, Intergenerational Solidarity: A Key to Social Cohesion and Sustainable Development*) Hayavadana reveals to the audience that he attempted to take an interest in the social life of the nation to become a "social being." Regardless of his efforts, he couldn't become a complete man. In the post-colonial world, humans mark themselves as superior because they have a better-developed social life wherein they can debate over concepts such as civics, politics, patriotism, nationalism, socialist or capitalist patterns of society, etc. However, despite trying to mold into this predetermined criterion of being a human, Hayavadana feels incomplete. Moreover, the actor points out that Hayavadana was singing the national anthem, national song, and many other patriotic songs to portray himself as a true patriot, one of the major qualities that humans associate themselves with. However, the part of the national anthem that he sings later is a less-heard part of the actual song.

The lurking question of whether the mind is the controller of the body or vice-versa remains unanswered in the play and is left to the readers to interpret. While Devadatta is shown as the representative of intellect, Kapila is portrayed as an example of physical strength. The playwright clearly distinguishes the two characters at the beginning of the play as a backdrop of the disarray that is about to unfold. Their identities are thoroughly articulated, however, gradually the reader realizes that the swapping of their heads results in the question: who is Kapila and who is Devadatta? The question of identity extends beyond Devadatta, and Kapila, reaching even Padmini's son. The child's paternity remains an unsolved question in the play, further solidifying the identity conflict.

The identity crisis experienced by Kapila and Devadatta after their heads are exchanged mirrors the existential crisis of the colonized societies where people were unsure of their national and social identities as well as their moral alignments. Devadatta getting the best of the situation and misusing the knowledge of the scriptures is a sign of social satire, as used by Girish Karnad to reflect that the society has deteriorated to the point where religion is being used to justify unnecessary clashes and to deepen divides in the community. Kapila mentions it in the text:

Don't tell me about your Sacred Texts. You can always twist them to suit your needs.

In the post-colonial world, camouflaged identities have become prevalent. People often present themselves as

someone they are not, adopting facades or masks. In *Hayavadana*, the use of masks is crucial in performance and conveying deeper meanings. The masks used by the actors are exchanged when Kapila and Devadatta switch heads, creating a sense of confusion and uncertainty. This uncertainty and sense of fear were also observed during the postcolonial era when people, with their newfound independence, had no clarity about what the future holds for them. Even the dolls are representative of Padmini's conscience and narrate her dreams to the audience. The dolls are, later, replaced by newer ones, which Padmini gives to her son before she commits Sati. They become the symbolic replacement for the absent parents of the child. However, they do not act as a positive guiding light, instead make him depressed, anti-social, and withdrawn. As soon as the dolls fall, the child laughs.

The depiction of Devadatta and Kapila beheading themselves as a sacrifice in the Kali temple is both violent and grotesque. This act aligns with the brutal reality of colonial times where violence emerged from ulterior motives and was driven by jealousy, hatred, misunderstandings, and the lack of appropriate guidance. People were led by moral and ethical clashes and the chaos of the colonial era can be reimagined through the scene where Kali herself points out that Kapila didn't sacrifice himself, but rather committed this act to save himself from getting accused.

And what lies! Says he is dying for friendship. He must've known perfectly well that he would be accused of killing Devadatta for you.

In the climax of the play, Hayavadana is shown as a complete horse, left with the trouble of a human voice. He tells Bhagvata about the incident where he visited the Kali temple and the Goddess granted his wish to be complete, but misinterpreted his request, turning him into a horse rather than a human. In the end, *Hayavadana* critiques the ignorance of writers towards the social context, suggesting that this has led readers towards escapism. Once the little boy sits on his back and laughs, Hayavadana's voice turns to a proper neigh, making him a complete horse, revealing that he has finally learned to accept himself.

IV. CONCLUSION

Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana* intertwines myth and modernity to examine the nature of identity in a postcolonial context. Through the intricate characters, the play addresses the quest for self-identity amidst the legacies of colonialism. Hayavadana, as a hybrid creature caught between human and animal forms, symbolizes the hybrid identities that arise from the clash of colonial and local cultures. His journey reflects the societal struggle to negotiate traditional values

with the demands of a modern world. Karnad's use of masks and ritualistic elements enlightens the theme of identity crisis, revealing how people in postcolonial societies often wrestle with multiple, conflicting identities. Ultimately, *Hayavadana* critiques the superficial and often escapist responses to identity crises in modern times. The transformation of Hayavadana into a complete horse, symbolized by his final acceptance of his nature, serves as a commentary on the need for self-acceptance.

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The Socio-Cultural Dimensions of Childhood: A Reading of Select Narratives

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Abstract— Modern Indian English fiction presents children and childhood in a manner that goes beyond conventional notions of innocence and offers complex readings of a rapidly changing society. One thing that immediately stands out is that modern portrayals show a child protagonist who is a perceptive commentator on a world that, from their simple perspective, contains contradictions, deficiencies, and deficiencies that cause anxiety. Such narratives also use childhood as a location that presents struggle and adjustment, often addressing issues related to communal riots, poverty, gender, and inequalities. Modern storytelling also places emphasis on the capability and activeness of children, who, far from being mere sufferers, demonstrate how they can challenge and redefine existing notions and constructions of society. Collectively, these readings show that a figure representing a child in modern Indian English literature uses that presence as a metaphor that captures the challenges as well as hopes that a modern era possesses, and therefore, this study shall exemplify that through selected readings on narratives that try to make sense of various readings on depictions related to childhood. In addition, the paper would also aim to investigate the representation of the child in the Indian popular media in an attempt to grasp the level at which commercialization of childhood is used as an ideological device in an attempt to transmit cultural meanings of childhood and its positioning in terms of the ideology of normal society. In this process of investigation, there would be an attempt at understanding the strategies and techniques involved in building particular imagery and meaning in terms of childhood in the given instances of popular culture.



Keywords— Childhood Studies; Socio-cultural Construction of Childhood; Agency of Children; Indian English Literature; Popular Culture; Commercialization of Childhood; Gender

I. INTRODUCTION

There has been a major shift in the depiction of children and childhood in modern Indian English fiction and media, a shift that has gone beyond the conventional definition of childhood as merely innocent. Children in modern literary texts act not simply as recipients of wisdom from adults, as they were portrayed before, but as keen observers and active agents of the happenings in a rapidly changing India. This reflects, of course, the socio-cultural transformation that India as a whole is undergoing, from urbanization, globalization, and religious communalism to a dissolution of family and community formations (Nayar 112). The figure of the child, consequently, takes on a very symbolic role as

a definition of a developing nation, embracing all the fears and hopes that this transformation involves (Banerjee 56).

In this paper, the socio-cultural aspects of childhood in selected contemporary Indian English literature and popular media texts would be examined to discuss the cultural construction of childhood in the literature, as in popular media, childhood is used as an ideological instrument to communicate cultural meaning effectively (Kumar 88). Based on the convergence of knowledge in literary critique, cultural study, and childhood study, the paper proposes to make an in-depth discussion of the aspects under consideration in the context of childhood representation and its role in the development of the discourse related to childhood and culture.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Childhood in India has been deeply rooted in cultural, religious, and historical contexts with major transformations at different levels over time (Balagopalan 14). In ancient Indian literature and folklore, such as the *Panchatantra* and *Jataka Stories*, childhood has been portrayed as a period of moral and practical learning with a fusion of entertainment and instruction (Rao 22). In these tales, an effort has been made to inculcate good qualities such as grit, honesty, and compassion and to shape the moral imagination of children (Sen 47). During the colonial period, children's books became a means of spreading Victorian values and Christian moral instructions at the cost of local knowledge and cultural narratives (Nandy 63).

Since the independence era, there has been an attempt to revive these narratives through initiatives such as the *Children's Book Trust* and *Amar Chitra Katha* series that specifically promoted narratives drawn from Indian history, mythology, and heritage volumes (Bose 101). Contemporary Indian writers have been able to broaden the themes that are explored in Indian children's literature to encompass notions such as gender equality, caste, social classes, social justice, the environment, and mental health that seek to give recognition to the active agency that children can exercise within society (Balagopalan 29).

The study of childhood in India can be said to have been shaped by scholars like Sudhir Kakar and Ashis Nandy, where the former presented a psychoanalytic reading of Hindu childhood (Kakar 88) and the latter, a postcolonial critique of the influence of Western culture on the notion of Indian childhood (Nandy 70). Sarada Balagopalan, Pradip Kumar Bose, and Satadru Sen have recently written about the sociological and historical construction of childhood, pressuring from domestic, educational, and political powers.

Indian English fiction offers a rich domain through which the complexities of childhood, identity, and nationhood are questioned thoroughly over the years. The pioneers in this domain, such as Anand, R.K. Narayan, and Raja Rao, paved the way through their works featuring children as protagonists in order to question social hierarchies, the problem of caste and colonial domination respectively. Anand's '*Coolie*' provides a nightmarish depiction of 'child labor' and its relation to 'caste' and 'economic violence' (Anand 78).

This tradition continues in contemporary literature, with *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie, *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy, and *The Shadow Lines* by Amitav Ghosh being representative examples that provide nuanced views on childhood as an experience of struggle, adaptation, and empowerment. More contemporary scholarship on childhood focuses on the psychological aspect, covering themes such as trauma, resilience, and emotional intelligence in the child. Figurative expressions on issues such as mental health, depression, and stress, coping with complex emotions in children, and providing them with the tools to deal with these circumstances are explored in works such as *Who Stole Bhैया's Smile?* by Sanjana Kapur, and *Inside a Dark Box*, a treatise on childhood trauma by Ritu Vaishnav.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS: AGENCY, FRAGMENTATION, AND IDEOLOGY

The research points to some significant theoretical concerns which form the basis of the analysis between childhood and contemporary Indian narratives. First, there is the concept of agency - children are portrayed as active agents rather than passive victims, with the capacity to question and reformat already existing social frameworks. This corresponds with the recent drift in the field of childhood studies as advocated by James and Prout. The second theme is the importance of fragmentation as it is related to the presentation of childhood in a country where rapid change is occurring. Innocence is often torn apart by political instability, dysfunctional families, and the tug of globalization, leading to the fragmentation of childhood experiences (Sen 47). Thirdly, the question of ideology and commercialization in the construction of childhood is also important. Childhood has also been utilized in popular ideology as a ploy in the dissemination of cultural meaning and the projection of ideological values (Kumar 88; Nandy 63). This phenomenon is also identifiable in the utilization of children in advertisements and movies as representations of innocence and as sources of emotion and information draws for audiences in films and on television (Kapur 12).

IV. METHODOLOGY

Specifically, the research uses qualitative and interdisciplinary research methodology that combines the analysis of selected texts of the Indian English literary scene with media analysis of exemplary texts of the Indian popular culture. The research is conducted with the guidance of the following research questions:

- What does the representation of children and childhood in current Indian English literary writings convey in terms of gender, class, communal tensions, commercialization, fragmentation, and other issues?
- How do these texts use the concept of the child as the agent of critique and change?
- How does the concept of childhood in Indian popular media function, and what ideological uses can be derived through the role of commercialization?
- What are the similarities and differences between literary and media depictions of childhood, and what is their impact on larger cultural discourses surrounding childhood and national identity?

In Indian English literature, childhood is depicted not simply as a phase of innocence but as a complex arena where social tensions, cultural aspirations, and questions of identity intersect. Texts such as *Mayil Will Not Be Quiet* (2011), *This is Me, Mayil* (2012) and *Mostly Madly Mayil* (2015) by Niveditha Subramaniam and Sowmya Rajendran place children at the center of narratives, portraying them as figures who grapple with the intertwined realities of gender, class, community, and globalization. Through these works, childhood emerges as a socially constructed and culturally contested space, one that reveals both the possibilities of empowerment and the vulnerabilities of marginalization.

It is pertinent to note that the Mayil series strategically uses the diary format as a platform that highlights the protagonist's experience of dealing with the confining forces of gender, family, and peers. In traditional literature, childhood has been depicted

through the lens of adults, presenting girls as passive, innocent, or constrained within the parameters of societal norms. In contrast to traditional literature, the Mayil series breaks the rule of childhood being depicted through the adult lens by giving the protagonist direct voiceage through the diary format. Her writings bring to the fore her own experiences, opinions, and critiques rather than being conveyed through the adult voiceage. It can well be characterized as self-writing, which indicates the feminist reconstruction of childhood as defined by Chanda (2018), which gives paramount importance to the girl's experience against the dominant male ideologies. Most Madly Mayil (2015), she proclaims her individuality: "I want to be vocal. I want to write all that I feel, even if my Amma calls it utter nonsense" (7).

Mayil's insistence on speaking out is deeply symbolic. By recording her thoughts, she asserts narrative control over her own life. This resonates with feminist childhood studies, which Mayil's self-reflections reveal how patriarchal structures are simultaneously internalized and interrogated, as she oscillates between conforming to familial norms and asserting her individuality. For instance, her entries about clothing choices and friendships highlight the subtle ways in which cultural scripts of femininity shape everyday childhood experiences, while her refusal to remain silent underscores her agency in redefining these roles. She worries about how she is perceived by peers and family, yet she resists these roles by asserting her individuality. In *Mayil Will Not Be Quiet* (2011), Mayil writes in her diary: "Why should only girls be told how to sit, how to talk, how to behave? Boys get away with everything" (Rajendran and Subramaniam 42). This aligns with Sarada Balagopalan's argument that childhood in India is often framed through normative expectations of gender and class, but children actively negotiate these boundaries. In *This is Me, Mayil*, her diary entries about crushes and friendships highlight the gender differences felt by children at young age which is evident from the statement "Everyone thinks it's silly if a girl has a crush, but boys can boast about it all the time" (Rajendran and Subramaniam).

This way, her diary becomes a performative act of resistance where she gets to critique the gender role, challenge the notion of family in her diary, and redefine what it means to grow up as a girl in India. In the Indian setting, 'her-story' acquires a deep significance in so far as it undermines the colonial and patriarchal traditions that exist within children's books. In other words, the inclusion of Mayil's narrative through her diary brings forth a cultural project aimed at reconstructing diverse, resistant narratives of childhoods which go beyond innocence and establish a dynamic, critical, and self-conscious concept of childhood. Mayil's diary in this regard becomes a whole lot more than a diary documenting the transition to maturity because, through her diary, her story paints a picture of a feminist intervention in the area of childhood. Such representations resonate with James and Prout's influential argument that childhood is socially constructed—a category produced through cultural discourses yet continually reshaped by children's practices and voices (James & Prout, 1997). This can be best illustrated by referring to Mayil's diary, which appears as a performance as far as her writing is concerned, as they pose a challenge to the adult paradigm. Moreover, her defiance against conventional femininity supports Chris Jenks's observation that

childhood occupies a position of critique and transformation, as youngsters use their perspective on childhood to subvert mainstream structures (Jenks, 2005). Thus, as depicted in this series, Mayil, as both subject and critic, reveals how Children's literature in English, published in India, occupies a position, which presents youngsters as agents in reshaping culture, thus participating in wider debates on childhood that concern issues related to "voice," "agency," and "identity."

The ideological construction of childhood through cultural meanings and representations has been seen to aid the production and dissemination of specific values and ideals validated by society. Indian popular cultural representations, for instance, tend to further shared ideas about normative childhood that exert a pervasive influence on the creation and internalisation of identities and individualities. Very often, cultural texts function as powerful discursive tools that condition the multiple ways in which childhood is imagined and experienced. The following observation attains significance in such a context. "Literary, media and popular texts are a powerful means by which the broad category of childhood is constructed, maintained, protected and challenged. Whether cultural texts are produced for children or about them, their depictions of childhood provide important resources for those interested in exploring the logics and practices through which contemporary childhoods are imagined, produced and experienced" (Khan & Saltmarsh 267). In the multitudinous contexts of Indian popular culture, childhood becomes a constructed category that reproduces dominant beliefs and practices pertaining to societal existence. Most often childhood becomes a metonymic reference point for shaping and consolidating institutionalised thought-processes and expectations that align with societal notions.

Certain ideologies tend to reinforce traditionally validated moral codes and patterns that are embedded within the behaviours and experiences attributed to childhood. In this sense, the ways in which children respond to the domestic and social space around them indicate meanings that touch upon the varied aspects of individual existence. Herein lies the importance of viewing childhood as socially constructed and as involving the "complex interweaving of social structures, political and economic institutions, beliefs, cultural mores, laws, policies and the everyday actions of both adults and children, in the home and on the street" and these also signify "the essential ingredients of the cultural politics of childhood." (James & James 13). There lies a certain multiplicity characterising the very construction of childhood, as different institutions position childhood within the demands and compulsions of dominant power systems. Within the cultural context of India, in particular, the child becomes a moral, cultural and social subject shaped ideologically and regulated by customary behaviour. Popular culture plays a significant role in perpetuating such images, constructing patterns and modes that may be emulated and validated by society. Through different manifestations that communicate with the masses, ideologies tend to be internalised in covert ways leading to the formulation of identities for the child. Different popular cultural texts exert a tremendous role in this regard and resort to various means and representative strategies to put across content that resonates specifically with children.

Some texts exclusively rely on the image of the child as a medium for ensuring better visibility and acceptance among the audience. For instance, in the advertisement for popular health drinks such as Horlicks and Boost, along with the motive of enhancing the product image and boosting sales, there also lies the idealisation of childhood in terms of reflecting societal expectations and moral values that are to be upheld in society. The child in such advertisements is represented as signalling a crucial stage of growth and development that has to be monitored and managed for the attainment of success. The implicit idea is regarding how the consumption of the product can accelerate the physical and mental well-being of the child, thereby also constructing a version of childhood where a specific phase of growth requires completion and fulfilment. Along with this, there can also be seen the association between academic achievement and physical development that ensures the child's competency and social visibility in the future as well. Concomitantly, such advertising also reiterates the image of the mother as a caregiver who is singularly responsible for choosing the ideal health drink that can cater to the requirements of childhood. Moreover, such a commercialisation of childhood for market gain also tends to exclude children from the margins as these cultural representations tend to project the needs, experiences and circumstances of children who largely belong to the middle class. Most importantly, the child image in such advertisements emphasise the importance of being socially and morally responsible, envisaging good citizenship, thereby also transforming the child into an embodiment of goodness. The child's identity is thus constructed in relation to a societal system of codes and regulatory behaviour. A similar idea is expressed in the tagline of the popular washing powder brand Surf Excel which states "daag achhe hain" (stains are good) when it involves the dissemination of values and actions that are meaningful and socially glorified. By using children as the main protagonists, this advertisement campaign centres on notions such as empathy, kindness, selflessness, generosity and naivety that are upheld as the intrinsic attributes of childhood. Thus, the child becomes an active social agent who is morally conscious, empathetic and considerate towards others, once again reminding the adult world about the importance of the right values. The child image represents a mixture of playfulness and responsibility that is expected to augur well for the creation of a just and equitable society. It can also be seen that childhood is sometimes represented not as a homogenised, idealised space but as a diverse and dynamic phase that is constantly being shaped by familial and social biases, expectations and judgments. The character of the child Sapna who is the daughter of the protagonist Shashi in the Hindi movie *English Vinglish* exemplifies the manner in which children are drawn towards internalising prejudices and attitudes from their surroundings and replicate hierarchical notions that society holds. However, the change that the character undergoes also presents childhood as a transitional space that contains the potential to negotiate and evaluate so called normative codes of conduct and identities. The conventional ideas about individual worth being determined by proficiency in English language and the patriarchal subordination of the woman are represented as being effortlessly imbibed by the child pointing to how childhood also entails the reproduction of power imbalances and mechanisms of domination. The self-realisation that the child attains as she witnesses her

mother's transformation in terms of confidence and capability, also indicates how many of the values and meanings embedded in society tend to be constructed according to systems of power and are subject to change. The idea of moral learning can thus be seen as a motif that is directly or indirectly woven into the narrative framework of popular narratives.

The fantasy television show *Baalveer*, exclusively targeting children, embodies a similar narrative strain that emphasises the ways in which moral and ethical values are learned, understood and communicated to the audience. Here again childhood becomes a formative phase where social values get inculcated in alliance with proper guidance and correction. Such images reinforce the notion of the 'ideal behaviour' that has to be instilled in children for ensuring their proper development as 'good' individuals. By depicting a binary structuring of moral/immoral behaviour using appropriate character positionings belonging to the two extremes of good and bad and the consequent reward/punishment, the narrative envisions a moral instruction that is articulated according to strictures and demands of societal regulation. By upholding such strictly patterned structures of thought, the narrative also simplifies individual behaviour by visualising it in terms of a dichotomy that is non-pervasive and fixed. This tends to exclude other forms of child behaviour that are varied, non-categorical and goes beyond strict boundaries. Such workings of power also tend to be seen in the manner in which socialisation with respect to gender roles becomes ascribed to childhood. Advertisements contain meanings and ideas that explicate gender norms and conventions that are effectively executed using imagery and techniques catering to childhood. For instance, in the advertisement for Kinderjoy, the gender binary tends to be reinforced in the very colour coding used in the packaging as the colours pink and blue tend to be attributed to the girl and boy respectively. Occasionally, advertisements also try to subvert such notions and strive to represent a fluidity that transcends gender prejudices as in the advertisement for the brand Comfort fabric conditioner, where washing clothes is portrayed as not being a woman's job alone. Here, the boy who taunts his sister saying that she might need to cultivate skills in managing domestic chores for the future is made to wash clothes by his mother who lovingly teaches him the lesson that one should go beyond gender stereotypes to bring in the change. Such attempts also point out how popular cultural manifestations indulge in the negation of accepted ideas and offer counter discourses of equality and opportunity.

These representative instances indicate how cultural texts display a range of emotions that strive to connect to the notions about childhood and consolidate constructions about innocence, moral superiority, wisdom and hope. There also lies the consumerist motive that capitalises on the societal ideas about childhood aiming to influence market interests and purchase habits. Even more pertinent is the emphasis given to middle-class childhood and its values and circumstances as popular culture tends to predominantly showcase children from such backgrounds and present such images as normal or as the ideal. Gendered ideologies also get articulated through the experiences and interests of children producing patriarchal values, marginalising certain identities. Such insights point to the fact that popular culture also plays a significant role in perpetuating ideas about how childhood

should be socially constructed with respect to children's behaviour and perception about themselves in relation to the adult world. Thus, childhood in popular culture brings into effect a curious mix of innocence, sincerity, intelligence and consumerism and children are seen to learn, "think, feel, communicate and act within the cultural practices and processes of a particular sociocultural context" (Kaur). Thus, different variations of childhood arise in relation to varying cultural contexts and the experience of childhood needs to be contextualised within the specificities and demands imposed by such specific circumstances. Thus, childhood assumes meaning within the discursive manipulations of societal power.

V. CONCLUSION

This research has examined the socio-cultural aspects of childhood in post-modern examples of English literary narratives and popular cultural texts in India to illustrate that it is neither universal nor apolitical but constructed in ideological ways. Rather than relating to innocence in literature in the expected romantic way, it has been made clear that children are active agents in recent examples who navigate and react to gender, class, communal identity, poverty, and capitalism in society that is rapidly changing in relation to global pressures.

The study of Indian popular media also supports this view and illustrates how the notion of childhood is intentionally constructed and used for the purpose of promoting ideological messages. For example, advertising, cinema, and television shows commonly use the trope of the child in their cultural production for promoting morals, patriarchal ideologies, consumerist dreams, and middle-class values. Although some cultural productions might aim at questioning stereotypes and providing a counter-discourse, the mainstream representation still favours mainstream frameworks of childhood, thereby neglecting alternative experiences of childhood. The commodification of childhood, therefore, stands revealed as a successful cultural practice that shapes identities and social aspirations.

By bringing together perspectives from studies of childhood, cultural studies, and literary studies, this study emphasizes that childhood as a site where power and ideology meet is of paramount importance. The representation of the figure of the child in contemporary narratives of India reflects both an image and an interpretation of society in its entirety. However, at its core, it also ascertains that representation in childhood has an immense significance in constructing cultural consciousness in relation to national identity and that the child is no longer just a subject of narration but also an active participant in constructing meaning in society.

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A Study on the Natural Imagery in Sylvia Plath's Poems from the Perspective of Dark Ecology

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Abstract— This study examines the natural imagery in Sylvia Plath's *Ariel* through the lens of dark ecology, a theoretical framework developed by Timothy Morton. The research investigates how Plath's portrayal of nature goes beyond the traditional romanticized depictions, presenting nature as a dark, uncanny force that mirrors her broader ecological concerns. By applying Morton's concept of dark ecology, which challenges anthropocentric views and emphasizes the interconnectedness of all beings, this study explores how Plath imbues natural imagery with both beauty and menace, illustrating the agency of nonhuman entities. The research focuses on how Plath's work disrupts conventional understandings of nature, urging a recognition of its autonomy and complexity. The study highlights how her poems reflect an understanding of nature's dark side, urging a shift in perspective toward coexistence and mutual respect. The findings suggest that Plath's poetry reveals a profound ecological awareness, advocating for a more respectful and balanced relationship between humans and nature. Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of Plath's ecological thought, offering new insights into her use of natural imagery as a vehicle for environmental and philosophical exploration. Through this analysis, Plath's work is revealed as a commentary on humanity's relationship with nature and the need for ecological consciousness in the face of environmental crises.



Keywords— Sylvia Plath, natural imagery, dark ecology.

I. INTRODUCTION

Sylvia Plath (1932-1963) is an industrious and brilliant American poet. Awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1982, several years after her death, she is regarded as a representative of confessional poets for her writing is quite intense, direct and violent. Because of her unique writing talent and her great contribution to the development of confessional poems, critics regard Plath as a "unique" poet and at the same time, take her as "convenient examples of new trends in American and English contemporary poetry" (Uroff 1977: i). Sylvia Plath's poem collections include *Ariel* (1965), *Crossing the Water* (1971), *Winter Trees* (1972) and *The Collected Poems* (1981). She also wrote an autobiographical work called *The Bell Jar* in 1963, the year she passed away. Among those works, *Ariel* was first published in the U.K. in 1965, arranged and edited by her husband Ted Hughes. In this poem collection, there are a

number of natural imageries, through which the various depictions by Plath can be easily found, and along with the sequence of poems, Plath's ecological thought becomes more and more explicit. This study takes *Ariel: The Restored Edition* as the research object to focus on Plath's descriptions of nature.

Plath's whole life was full of misfortune, and she suffered from manic depressive psychosis. The abrupt loss of her father when she was just eight years old left a profound impact on her. Her marriage to Ted Hughes came to an end because of betrayal, making her a single mother taking care of two children. All the experiences led to her suicide in 1963. Her life has provided her with a great source of inspiration and evoked her deep thoughts about life. Most of her poems embrace such themes as death, rebirth, emotional depression and loneliness, conveying conflict and passion directly. Her despair of life and

uncanny misery were demonstrated through her poems, resorting to several particular images. According to a Chinese scholar Zhao Zheng (2008), in the 224 poems Ted Hughes collected in *The Collected Poems* by Sylvia Plath written from 1956 to 1963, one can easily find a long array of titles and lines when Plath turns to the sun, the moon, the sea, the trees, the flowers and the bees for her poetic voice.

The prominence of these natural imageries may even be expressed in such titles as poetry collections *Crossing the Water* (1971) and *Winter Trees* (1971). What's worth mentioning is that her usage of natural imagery is quite different from that of poets during the Romantic Period, who mostly took that imagery as metaphor to indicate their own life and hope, but she preferred to endow seemingly original imagery with insightful even paradoxical connotations, which may break readers' conventional understanding and association of the objects. What's more, Plath's depiction of natural imagery implies her contemplation and comprehension of the relationship between humans and nature, which mainly refers to the idea that human beings are supposed to accept the mystery and strangeness of nature and show great respect to nature. This research delves into the natural imagery appearing in *Ariel: The Restored Edition* (2010) and aims to figure out her unique understanding of nature.

The poems of Sylvia Plath have been widely discussed by scholars since the end of the 20th century, and both researchers abroad and at home have paid great attention to Plath's *Ariel*. On the one hand, by taking close reading as the main approach, critics explore themes such as life and death, trauma, escaping and imprisonment, and highlight imagery of nature, color and paintings, as well as some medical imagery in poems. Besides, writing techniques are also noticed and studied by professionals, who analyze such techniques as Plath's poems as metaphor, Ekphrasis, and her adoption of myths and other art forms related to Plath's creation poetics. On the other hand, critics excavate Plath's poems from various perspectives, especially from feminism and ecofeminism. In addition, since Plath has a miserable life and suffers from neurosis and psychosis, a great number of scholars aim to penetrate Plath's inner anxiety and conflict through psychoanalysis. They dig deeply into the connection between Plath's life attitude and her poems.

It is worth mentioning that scholars at home and abroad show great interest in the natural imagery in Plath's poems. Regarding overseas studies, Perloff (1970) concludes that the animism expressed through Plath's poems discloses that human beings are inanimate and unreal while everything non-human is intensely alive, vital and potent. Perloff's research shows Plath's emphasis on

nature and things/objects. Ragaišienė (2009) interprets the tree symbolism in Plath's poems from the perspective of ecofeminism and reconsiders the binary opposition of nature and culture, as well as female and culture. Ragaišienė (2009) finds out that the image of the tree indicates females' self-identity and great hope for the relocation of nature/culture hierarchies and a delineation of potentialities for alternative visions. What's more, domestic studies are taken to concentrate on the ecological depiction in Plath's poems. Zhu (2006) is the first domestic scholar to underscore the ecological awareness of Plath and its link with her female identity. He notices the interconnection of *Silent Spring* and Plath's poems and points out Plath's ecological awareness and self-anxiety during her lifetime. Liu (2011) explores the image of blackberries in Mary Oliver and Sylvia Plath's poems, drawing a conclusion that images show multi-level meanings in their poems. She also advocates that Plath's usage of image embodies the feature of the freedom and openness of image meanings. Zhao (2008) and Qian (2018) further continue the analysis of the nature writing of Plath's poems from the perspective of ecofeminism and seek the intercommunity of females and nature, finding that the nature writing in Plath's poems indeed demonstrates the female condition in patriarchal society.

Most of these studies connect Plath's poems with her ecofeminist thoughts, while few studies have delved into the dark natural imagery solely and explained its deep function of implying Plath's ecological worries. Based on the previous research, this study further focuses on the darkness and strangeness of nature imagery and explores Plath's ecological thoughts through analyzing the nature imagery by adopting the theory of dark ecology.

This study takes Timothy Morton's theory of dark ecology as a theoretical basis, which is formally put forward in *Dark Ecology* (2016). According to *The Langman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (6th Edition), "dark" means "mysterious", "evil" and "no light". While in Morton's use of "dark", the word is synonymous with "weird", "strange", "uncanny" and "shadow", with deeper connotation (Morton 2016). Dark ecology originally comes from Morton's critical comment on "Deep Ecology", which takes human superiority and "anthropocentrism" over nature for granted, as Morton (2016: 26) argues. Holding this belief, Morton tries to construct a new understanding of environmental aesthetics, which mainly consists of three philosophies.

First of all, Morton (2016: 138) declares that dark ecology is "without Nature", where Nature means "agrilogistics" (Morton 2016: 55), which regards human presence as more important than any other quality, then aggravates the nature-agriculture split. He disproves this

opinion and insists that there is no "Nature" standing opposed to human and human beings and nature are all in coexistence. After that, he interprets coexistence further and believes the idea that humans could shape nature is a kind of inner reflection and aesthetic fantasy of human beings about nature. Ecology should first separate "Nature" from this kind of imagination of human beings (Zhang 2018). So it is unavoidable to accept and face the dark side of nature directly. Furthermore, Morton (2016: 147) acknowledges that "There are no subjects and (non OOO) objects anymore, just various kinds of specter". OOO refers to object-oriented ontology, which developed from a deep consideration of the implications of Martin Heidegger's version of modern Kantian correlationism (Morton 2016: 16). What he emphasizes is that dark ecology is not merely reversing the positions of environment (object) and human (subject), but paying close attention to nonhuman agency. If one deprivatizes correlationism, one arrives quickly at some idea that everything has agency, everything is "alive", possibly "conscious" (Morton 2017: 56). At last, the answer to the question about the ecological view is provided. Human and nonhuman entities are together in a "mesh": a sprawling network of interconnection without center or edge (Morton 2016: 81). The "gap" (Morton 2016: 17) between the human and everything else can't be filled in, and the real ecological refers to keeping a respectful distance from nature.

Based on this theory, this study explores the dark side of nature depicted in *Ariel*, and then examines the nonhuman agency expressed through imagery in detail. Finally, this study tries to get a clear understanding of Plath's ecological view, which is facing the dark side of nature directly, accepting the agency of nature, taking nature as a stranger and showing humans' respect for it, and finally coexisting with nature in a big and uncanny "mesh".

II. THE DARKNESS OF NATURAL IMAGERY

Plath's depiction of natural imagery embodies a kind of duality. On the one hand, the natural imagery becomes the personal inner reflection of nature, bearing her beautiful vision on the nonhuman entities. On the other hand, the darkness and corruption of natural imagery occupy an essential position in her poems. Before discussing the description of the dark side of nature, it is necessary to mention that Plath is also trying to impose human imagination on nature.

It can be found that a few natural images in *Ariel* keep the traditional connection with human activities and their values of existence are decided by the poet

according to her current emotions. Actually, those images stay unknown and "mysterious" (Morton 2016: 55), on which human beings impose their own understandings and forcefully interpret them as holding different meanings. In the lines of "Our cheesecloth gauntlets neat and sweet, The throats of our wrists brave lilies" (Plath 2010: 107), Plath is describing the action of moving beehives. The lilies mentioned here are added with the word "brave", which symbolizes Plath's life attitude at that moment. In her poems about bees, she gains insights into the significance of female life from observing bees:

It is almost over.

I am in control.

Here is my honey-machine,

It will work without thinking,

Opening, in spring, like an industrious
virgin

To scour the creaming crests

As the moon, for its ivory powders,
scours the sea.

A third person is watching.

He has nothing to do with the bee-seller
or with me.

Now he is gone (Plath 2010: 108)

The life of hope is projected onto the bees, and bees and flowers are connected to the vitality of spring. The natural imagery here indeed serves to express the poet's delight and joy. By the way, there is always the "presence" of the human "I", which further clarifies the anthropocentrism and humans' inner mental projection on nature. In the poem called *Nick and the Candlestick*, Plath considers "rose" as a symbol of love, "Love, love, I have hung our cave with roses, With soft rugs" (Plath 2010: 63). Except for love, "roses" are depicted as something erotogenic, which implicitly shows Plath's eros desire and pursuit of love. Besides, "roses" also play the role of decoration, hanging in the cave.

Although some imageries carry Plath's aesthetic fantasy, quite a lot of natural imageries expose their darkness and rot directly. Just as Morton writes, "A rigid and thin concept of Life is what dark ecology rejects" (Morton 2016: 137). Plath reveals the diversity of nature, and breaks the stereotype of original perception and description of nature and makes a rudimentary expression of her "Ecognosis" (Morton 2016: 5), which is explained by Morton as a kind of knowing and coexisting, and it is like being accustomed to something strange. He believes the whole nature is strange for human beings, let alone the darkness of it. Plath portrays these aspects explicitly and

confronts them face-to-face. In the poem called *Ariel*, Plath writes at the beginning, "Stasis in darkness. Then the substanceless blue Pour of tor and distances" (Plath 2010: 47). This not only indicates Plath's preference for the color of black, but it also describes the profound and strange nature.

In another poem, Plath depicts "Nigger-eye/Berries cast dark Hooks Black/sweet blood mouthfuls, Shadows. Something else" (Plath 2010: 47). These words illustratively present the primitive image of berries, which are flowing with red and dark juice. Even though it is the most authentic state of berries, this kind of portrait endows the nonhuman entity with a strange and mysterious power. And the poet does not show any repulsion of this darkness, however, she accepts these uncanny natural imageries with a calm and composed attitude. Zhang (2022) accounts for this awareness in her words, and he thinks dark ecological thought can be concluded as a profound criticism of the existing ecological consciousness. It exposes the illusions of those inherent ecological thinking habits by delving into the shadows and backlights of other ecological consciousnesses. For this reason, Plath's confronting the darkness of nature contributes a lot to building up the "Ecognosis". The following is another example:

Strips of tinfoil winking like people,

Feather dusters fanning their hands in a sea of bean flowers,

Creamy bean flowers with black eyes and leaves like bored hearts.

Is it blood clots the tendrils are dragging up that string?

No, no, it is scarlet flowers that will one day be edible. (Plath 2010: 102)

Through these depictions, as if the bean flowers were staring at the poet with their black eyes, combined with their white petals, and the strong contrast between black and white in the night sky adds an uncanny atmosphere to nature. Besides, the use of simile unfolds humans' subjective projection onto nature. In the poem called *The Moon and the Yew Tree*, Plath describes "The moon sees nothing of this. She is bald and wild. And the message of the yew tree is blackness and silence" (Plath 2010: 84). The strangeness and mystique are completely expressed. Except for exposing the intuitive darkness of the natural imagery, the poet presents the decay of nature, which is probably affected by ecological damage:

Or shall I bring you the sound of poisons?

This is rain now, this big hush.

And this is the fruit of it: tin-white, like arsenic

I have suffered the atrocity of sunsets.

Scorched to the root

My red filaments burn and stand, a hand of wires.

Now I break up in pieces that fly about like clubs.

A wind of such violence

Will tolerate no bystanding: I must shriek.

...I am terrified by this dark thing...

That sleeps in me;

All day I feel its soft, feathery turnings, its malignity. (Plath 2010: 40-41).

Some critics generally take this poem as evidence of Plath's schizophrenia and use it to prove that she is extremely depressed and seriously lacking in satisfaction (Holbrook 1976: 105). It is indeed a reasonable comprehension. While this study prefers to connect the poem with Plath's environmental awareness. Zhu (2006) believes that it can be seen that *Elm* describes the radioactive hazards and the effects of chemical substances on an elm and a woman by comparing it with Carson's *Silent Spring*, published in 1962, the time when Plath wrote this poem. This explanation provides a great foundation for this study. In the Cold War period, the United States and the Soviet Union detonated many super nuclear bombs in the atmosphere, causing a serious threat to the ecological environment and human survival.

Based on the background information, it is possible to believe that Plath not only describes the darkness of nature, but she also unfolds her worries about ecology in the poem. There is "sound of poison" from the elm, and the sound makes the earth into a "big hush", leaving no more animation and vitality but something "like arsenic", keeping corroding the land. Even worse, the "sunsets" give up their gentleness and carry out atrocity. Some scholars consider it a metaphor, which compares the soot in the chimney to the yellow color of sunset (qtd. in Brain 1998: 149). "My red filaments burn and stand, a hand of wires. Now I break up in pieces that fly about like clubs," furtherly demonstrates the situation of a nuclear explosion, which splits "I" apart. The nonhuman entity nuclear weapon is produced by humans, and vice versa, giving rise to trouble and destroying the coexistence of humans and nonhuman (nature). Whether the dark thing is created by humans or not, it exists with humans in the big

“mesh” and influences nature and “sleeps in me” from the beginning to the end.

Nature is full of darkness, corruption and myth, and Plath unmask the philosophy in her writings. Even though she puts her own imagination on the natural imagery, she finally accepts the ruined nature and gives up the romantic nature. What's more, she sees the agency of nature, because at least in this poem, the elm is able to speak.

III. THE AGENCY OF NATURAL IMAGERY

In Plath's poems, there are a number of natural images that are endowed with agency, and they are not just symbols of personification, but become entities that may hurt and attack human beings. If the early reception of Plath is governed by a subject-centric way of reading, there is at the same time an attempt at negating this label of confessional poetry by stressing its more thing-oriented qualities. From Morton's point of view, it is a kind of object-oriented ontology view that all beings have agency, even mind (Morton 2017: 59). It also refers to something like an animism—an awareness of nonhuman agency, consciousness, affect, significance beyond the human (Morton 2016: 94). Admitting the agency of nonhuman entities does not mean simply regarding nature as the subject, but it holds the belief that there's no binary of subject and object. Showing respect to the nonhuman agency could be beneficial for humans to form a proper ecological understanding. It is evident that Plath is consistent with this philosophy.

In the poem called *Tulips*, Plath describes how the strong red color of “tulips” has hurt her directly like a shining sword and the glance from the tulips makes her feel uneasy and worried. They are given a completely opposite appearance from the traditional imagery of affection, becoming fear-inducing as if hiding some deep and unnamed dark force:

The tulips are too red in the first place,
they hurt me.

Even through the gift paper I could hear
them breathe

Lightly, through their white swaddlings,
like an awful baby.

Their redness talks to my wound, it
corresponds.

They are subtle: they seem to float,
though they weigh me down,

Upsetting me with their sudden tongues
and their color,

A dozen red lead sinkers round my neck.
(Sylvia Plath 2010: 31)

The red color radiated from the “tulips” is interpenetrating in the poem, causing a sudden and strong effect on the poet. Since the world in the poet's vision is totally gloomy, such a violent and bloody existence brings her a stabbing pain, especially through the striking contrast between white and red. What's more, despite the fact that the “tulips” are nonhuman entities, the poet describes them standing as human beings, with the capability to breathe and tongues to phonate and even talk. Plath makes use of personification to portray the “tulips” as an ice-cold and pernicious entity, taking actions driven by premeditation like humans. The “tulips” in Plath's poem even have eyes and they watch “me” with inexorability, and they take the agency to stare at “me”. The eyes of tulips and the eye of the sun have taken up the surrounding space, as if they are squeezing “me” until there is no room for “me”. Acting as a confronting force, these “tulips” set the “me” into self-doubt and self-denial, desiring to “efface myself”. There is a fierce contrast between them. The redder and stronger the tulips are, the paler and weaker “I” am. The nonhuman agency breaks the fantasy of the human, and shows the unknown, mysterious side in front of “me”.

The tulips should be behind bars like
dangerous animals;

They are opening like the mouth of some
great African cat,

And I am aware of my heart: it opens and
closes

Its bowl of red blooms out of sheer love
of me.

The water I taste is warm and salt, like
the sea,

And comes from a country far away as
health. (Sylvia Plath 2010: 32)

These lines come from the final part of the poem *Tulips*, where the “tulips” are shaped into a highly threatening symbol, transformed from traditional representations of beauty into “dangerous animals” lurking in the shadows, ready to strike. And their blossoming flowers are skillfully likened to some “great African cat” preparing to hunt, adding a layer of profound terror to the entire poem. Under these circumstances, the poet's subjective initiative is greatly diminished, and her consciousness gradually awakens, according to Zeng (2008). While this study delves into the ecological transformation of the poet. She does not become subject or object, while she figures out the coexistence of human and nonhuman entities with awareness of nature's cruelty. Just

like Wei (2013: 135) mentions, neither the trees nor the flowers welcomed her arrival. They ignored her and gave unfriendly warnings. The poet is reflecting that perhaps her arrival has disrupted the peace of the forest, which has led to nature's indifferent treatment.

The wind gagging my mouth with my
own blown hair,
Tearing off my voice, and the sea
Blinding me with its lights, the lives of
the dead
Unreeling in it, spreading like oil.
I tasted the malignity of the gorse,
Its black spikes,
The extreme unction of its yellow candle-
flowers.
They had an efficiency, a great beauty,
And were extravagant, like torture.
(Sylvia Plath 2010: 19)

These are the beginning lines of *The Rabbit Catcher*, the poet describes a hostile scene where the wind "tearing off my voice" and the sea "blinding me", leaving the smell of death. Despite wind and sea, the gorse shows its malignity to "me" together with its "black spikes", and all existence contains both beauty and torture, which are filled with tension. Plath does acknowledge the beauty of "gorse", but the beauty also marks potential danger and hostility. Again, the "yellow candle flowers" radiate their charming color and represent aggressive power. The nature in the poems of Plath releases its own strength and emotions like a human, and it also includes a mysterious and dark atmosphere, which may frighten humans. Even though Morton (2009: 160) believes nature is a mysterious harmony, a collection encompassing all the ugly, corrupt and sinister elements. Human beings need to expose these dark sides of nature, and Plath is doing so. Except for the wind and sea, "The moon, also, is merciless: she would drag me/Cruelly, being barren. Her radiance scathes me. Or perhaps I have caught her" (Sylvia Plath 2010: 41). In most writings, "I" am not welcomed by the nature, which takes its autonomy and agency and the nonhuman existence always has devastating power:

Of a snuffed candle!
Love, love, the low smokes roll
From me like Isadora's scarves, I'm in a
fright
One scarf will catch and anchor in the
wheel.
Such yellow sullen smokes

Make their own element. They will not
rise,

But trundle round the globe
Choking the aged and the meek,
The weak (Plath 2010: 99)

These lines describe the occasion where a woman starts the car, and at the same time, the long scarf around her neck is rolled into the wheel and she is hanged alive. The nonhuman entities include technological products, and they possess tremendous power. As a technological product, automobiles not only emit exhaust gases that pollute the environment and suffocate the "aged and the weak", but also can directly kill people. In the following lines, Plath directly mentions "Devilish leopard! Radiation turned it white/And killed it in an hour. Greasing the bodies of adulterers/Like Hiroshima ash and eating in. The sin. The sin" (Plath 2010: 99). "Hiroshima ash" and the imagery related to melting and forced welding once again breaks out into a dark killing force, and according to Zhu (2006), it reflects great concerns and worries about the impact of nuclear explosions on the human body during the Cold War.

As a human being, "I" am forced to face the malignity and apathy of nature and even hurt by these nonhuman entities. Plath points out the imbalance of human and nature and indicates that the traditional position of human and nature is unreasonable:

This is the light of the mind, cold and
planetary.

The trees of the mind are black. The light
is blue.

The grasses unload their griefs on my
feet as if I were God,

Prickling my ankles and murmuring of
their humility (Plath 2010: 83).

On the one hand, the "grasses" are "prickling my ankles" and vent their grief by making use of their strength. The poet admits the agency and animism of those tiny grasses and believes in the power of nature. On the other hand, human is considered as the "God", and the grasses are so tiny, only murmuring their "humility". These lines prove that there is an unbalanced relationship between human and nonhuman entities.

Through the previous analysis, it can be concluded that Plath is conscious of the ecological philosophy that natural existence possesses agency and is not an object completely controlled by human beings, offering a foundation for the later clarification of an

appropriate and balanced relationship between human and nature.

IV. THE MESH EXISTENCE OF NATURE AND HUMAN

It is evident that Plath unfolds the darkness and agency of nature through the previous analysis. These features violate the fantasy of nature that “deep ecology” upholds and reveal the essence of nature, provoking a revolutionary ecological thought. Except for the previous analysis based on her poems, Plath’s ecological thoughts can be found in other materials, so this part will make more connections with Plath’s other poems, journals and her life.

From the previous analysis, human beings are sometimes hurt by the nonhuman entities, as if human beings lose their subjectivity. While this kind of phenomenon is explained by Morton (2016: 9), who believes that human beings are “implicated” in the ecosystem, a “strange loop”, and don’t hold dominant rights in the ecological environment. The nonhuman entity in nature is called “Strange stranger” by Morton (2016: 18). It is familiar, which also means that it is uncanny (German, *heimisch*, “familiar” and “unfamiliar”, “intimate” and “monstrous” at the same time). Human beings’ observation of these “strangers” may always stay mysterious and strange. Nearness does not mean obviousness (Morton 2016: 11). After getting near to them, Plath seems to accomplish building up her unique “Ecognosis” of nature.

At the beginning, her journal confirms the first philosophy of Morton, which presents human beings’ imagination and fantasy projection on nature. She writes, “the ugliness which by man’s sense of wishful thinking becomes a beauty, touching us all (Plath 2007: 40). The “clean unbroken sense that the rocks, which are nameless, the waves which are nameless, the ragged grass, which is nameless”, are all defined momentarily through the consciousness of the being who observes them (Plath 2007: 95). Besides, Plath (2007:43) describes the strangeness of the ecosystem in her journal, “looking over, looking down into the windy blackness and not being quite able to make out, through the yellow, stinking mist, just what lies below in the slime, in the oozing, vomit-streaked slime”. Plath’s writing not only demonstrates the ugliness of nature, but it also indicates that Plath tries to figure out what lies below that blackness, however, because of nature’s strangeness, it is hard to figure out nature completely. The agency of nature is also expressed through her journal:

Now I lay, burning, fevered with this disease, and the sun glared at me all at once, a lowering

orange eye, blank and mocking; it set on time, I clocked it. And again the dark eats at me: the fear of being crushed in a huge dark machine, sucked dry by the grinding indifferent millstones of circumstance (Plath 2007: 276).

The sunset glares at me” like an “orange eye”, and the surrounding environment is full of darkness, devouring “my” energy. Again, the agency and aggressiveness subvert the Romantic and imaginative nature. After disclosing those dark aspects, the agency and strangeness of nature, there is a great need to explore an appropriate ecological awareness. Morton (2009: 184) points out that the ecosystem is interconnected in sum. Just as Chen (2024) explains, the world is composed of objects/things, among which the objects have relationships that are both strange and familiar to each other. The world is connected in the grid formed by such relationships.

Because of her experience of learning botany (Plath 2007: 81) and living in Preston (Plath 2007: 119), Plath has several opportunities for close contact with nature. During the period of strolling along the beach of Preston, she finds that, “From this experience I emerged whole and clean, bitten to the bone by sun, washed pure by the icy sharpness of salt water, dried and bleached to the smooth tranquility that comes from dwelling among primal things” (Plath 2007: 95). The “primal things” refers to the nature, which is dark, but pure and clean. After accepting the fact that it is ugly, Plath opens up a seemingly ideal condition to stay with nature, both human and nonhuman entities dwelling together in a mesh. The mesh can be understood through this philosophy: the combination of massive yet finite spatiality and massive and indeterminate time generates a very specific “game board” on which cooperation and its opposite play out (Morton 2016: 53-54). The hope of cooperation and harmonious coexistence of humans and nature is also indicated by her. She could not wonder only how she could ever bear to live anywhere else, away from the sea, the physical ease, the sun, the spaciousness (Plath 2007: 98). Human beings enjoy the beauty of nature and always keep a close connection with nature.

However, even human and nonhuman entities exist in the great mesh together, they do not cooperate all the time. The damage caused by human beings to nature is mentioned and criticized by Plath as well:

But the squirrels would still be there, and the birds. Long after, unless the smoke and the radioactivity (Oh, Marie Curie, if you could know!) got them. I can only hazard. In the back of my mind there are bombs falling, women & children screaming, but I can’t describe it now. I don’t know how it will be (Plath 2007: 42).

Just as the description in *Fever 103°* in the previous analysis, Plath reveals the worries and vigilance of environmental pollution and crisis. Most of them are brought by nuclear or radioactive weapons of war. When it comes to the entanglement of humans and nature, Plath tells the truth that no one knows what the world will be like. There is a sense of indeterminacy on the “game board”, indicating that human behaviors are closely connected to the nonhuman entities. A slight move in one part may affect the situation as a whole. Plath (2007: 22) deems “We’re still nothing but animals”. There is no definite boundary between humans and nature, because all are entities existing in the mesh.

By acknowledging the coexistence between humans and nature, Plath further sets up her ecological awareness, which is always keeping her respect for nature and admitting the independence of humans and nature. “On the short walk from here to the libe/ I drink the cold pure night air and the clear unbelievably delicate crescent moonlight with a greedy reverence” (Plath 2007: 213). It may be the prime attitude toward nature: admitting its darkness, recovering its agency, and keeping a respectful “gap” with nature. As Morton (2016: 17) says, “The gap between the human and everything else can’t be filled in, as racism tries to do”. For this reason, it is a must to keep “in-between” (Morton 2009: 106) state of entities, which emphasizes the coexistence and interdependence between people and others, which cannot be separated, but at the same time paradoxically maintains the interrelationship with others, rather than pursuing assimilation.

V. CONCLUSION

As an outstanding poet in American literature, Sylvia Plath takes poems as an approach to speak out about her ecological concerns about the world. Even some scholars interpret some expressions into Plath’s inner conflict, but except for those self-related topics, Plath is positively concerned about her surroundings. During the Cold War era, she witnessed the poisoning of both humans and nature by radioactive substances and the cruelty of war. The harm caused by war is exposed through her writing, and the call for a mesh coexistence can also be found in her poems. It is evident to find her vigilance of environmental pollution and her ultimate ecological consciousness of revering nature.

Based on the previous analysis and the connection between Plath’s natural imagery and Morton’s dark ecology, this study discovers Plath’s unique and revolutionary ecological awareness, which directly faces the darkness of nature, acknowledging the agency of nature, and showing respect to nature on the “game-

board”. It is reasonable to believe that human and nonhuman entities were, are and will be involved in the same mesh and exist with each other. In order to construct a bright future for humans and nature, the foremost step is to abandon the excessively naïve fantasy toward nature and the ecosystem and to admit the uncontrollability of human beings on nature, finally forming a calmer and more sensible attitude toward nature.

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Exploring Human-Nature Relationship and Alienation in Nissim Ezekiel's "Urban": An Eco-Linguistic Study

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Abstract— *Ecolinguistics, an evolving branch of linguistics, studies the interaction between languages and the ecosystem, where practically every human action is affected by the language they choose to use. This study examines Nissim Ezekiel's poem "Urban" through eco-linguistic lenses to explore how language constructs the human-nature relationship and produces ecological alienation within modern urban life. Although scholars have written extensively about Ezekiel's poetry in the context of identity, urbanization, and traditions, very few have attempted to address the ecological aspects of his works. The study is based on Arran Stibbe's (2021) model of ecolinguistics, along with insights from Halliday's functional linguistics and Fairclough's discourse theory. It employs qualitative textual analysis to investigate lexical choices, grammatical patterns, metaphorical framing, and evaluative language in the poem. The poem depicts urban life as repetitive, emotionally restrictive, and ecologically disconnected, reinforcing an anthropocentric worldview that normalizes environmental neglect. This study contributes to eco-linguistic scholarship by extending its application to Indian English poetry and examining ecological consciousness and environmental ideology.*



Keywords— *Ecolinguistics, Ecological Alienation, Urban Discourse, Nissim Ezekiel, Human-Nature Relationship*

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Language is essential to our humanity, and linguistics is the systematic study of human language (Bang & Døør, 2007). Linguistics is an academic discipline focused on the study of language undertaken by linguists. The concept of the environment and its related challenges is a subject of frequent and intense discourse among diverse parties. This suggests that climate change on Earth will also affect societal transformation. An interdisciplinary field known as ecolinguistics investigates the relationship between ecology and language.

Haugen (1972) first introduced the field of ecolinguistics in his article "Ecology of Language." He prefers the term language ecology to other related concepts. The study is ascribed to its comprehensive scope, facilitating collaboration among linguists and other social sciences in

understanding the interplay of the Håugen language (Fill & Mühlhäusler, 2001). Ecolinguistics links language with ecology. Halliday (1990) advocated an ecological humanities-based strategy for linguistic study that pushed linguists to consider language's ecological impact. Fill (1998) warned applied linguists that their subject matter contributes to environmental difficulties by promoting classism and speciesism.

Nissim Ezekiel is a prominent character in Indian English literature. He is acknowledged for his penetrating insights into society, culture, and the human condition. He has examined various themes in his poetry, including love, loneliness, human imperfections, and superstitions. The poet is profoundly embedded in current Indian society that he cannot detach himself from it, yet he occasionally adopts a sardonic viewpoint on human shortcomings. While much of the critical discourse around Ezekiel's work highlights

themes of identity, tradition, and urban life, there is an inadequately explored potential to evaluate his poetry from the standpoint of eco-linguistics. This study seeks to analyze how Ezekiel's poetry reflects environmental concerns, ecological consciousness, and human-nature relationships through linguistic choices and representations. The poet articulates his environmental apprehensions through fitting language. His poems use lucid language and exhibit intellectual profundity, demonstrating his deep care for both living and non-living elements that foster a healthy environment. He seems to aim to promote self-realization among contemporary persons to complete their responsibilities in conserving biodiversity, as we all must participate in the cycle of life.

This study specifically analyzes Ezekiel's poem "Urban" to investigate how language depicts the human-nature relationship in urban environments. The poem illustrates ecological alienation, depicting the metropolis as a realm disconnected from natural systems. This research employs an eco-linguistic approach to examine how Ezekiel's linguistic selections create environmental significations and challenge anthropocentric urban narratives.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Nissim Ezekiel's poetry has been well analyzed for its emphasis on identity, urban existence, tradition, and social critique. Existing studies rarely examine how language in "Urban" constructs the human-nature relationship and reflects ecological alienation. This gap limits an understanding of how Ezekiel's linguistic choices represent environmental concerns and challenge anthropocentric urban ideology. This study addresses the gap by applying an eco-linguistic framework to analyze how "Urban" portrays the erosion of human-nature relationships in modern city life.

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To analyze how Nissim Ezekiel's poem "Urban" represents the human-nature relationship through linguistic choices.
2. To examine how urban discourse in "Urban" contributes to ecological alienation from an eco-linguistic perspective.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How does Nissim Ezekiel's poem "Urban" represent the human-nature relationship through language?
2. In what ways does "Urban" linguistically construct ecological alienation in urban life?

1.5 Significance of the Study

Eco-linguistics is an emerging discipline, and this research applies it to Indian English poetry, a literary domain frequently neglected in ecological analyses. The language

of Nissim Ezekiel's poetry illustrates their connection with or opposition to ecological ideals. This study examines the emerging field of eco-linguistics by applying its ideas to the analysis of Indian English poetry, a topic that has been relatively neglected from an ecological perspective. Moreover, by synthesizing literary and linguistic research, the study harmonizes eco-critical and linguistic viewpoints on literature, offering an extensive understanding of poetry's influence on ecological consciousness.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Ecolinguistics has been closely linked with the work of the Norwegian-American linguist Einar Haugen, who made the first attempt to use ecology as a metaphor in language studies about fifty years ago. "The modern Norwegian linguist Haugen was perhaps the first to use the word ecology in connection with language" (Haugen, 1972, p. 325). He understood the environment of a language as the people using the language, as well as the socially and mentally associated phenomena, although he did not analyze the social environment in detail. Even so, he did suggest a correspondence between linguistic ecology and the relations of animals and plants in their living environment.

Regardless, the connection of language and environment has a much deeper intellectual background. Certain authors have made profound studies about the entire history of the development of this issue. Couto (2014), LeVasseur (2015), Mühlhäusler (2003), and Zhou (2021) have documented the evolution of ecolinguistics thought, identifying some of its most important precursors. Their work emphasizes the principles that constitute the present-day image of ecolinguistics. Although this review does not strive to provide a complete historical analysis, it recognizes the evolution of ecolinguistics as a separate field due to the work of these scholars.

In addition to ecolinguistic and ecocritical studies, ecofeminist scholarship from regional contexts highlights how gender and ecological subordination converge in literature. For instance, Khan and Shah's (2025) ecofeminist study of selected Pakistani novels demonstrates how narratives depict *gendered oppression and environmental exploitation* as interconnected phenomena rooted in patriarchal and capitalist ideologies, thereby offering alternative frameworks for understanding human-nature relations in South Asian literary texts.

In his 2003 study, Mühlhäusler enhanced the field by combining ecological metaphors with the practice of analyzing language through a critical ecologist lens. He used lexicon, grammar, metaphor, and narrative as fundamental elements of language to be analyzed in the

environmental discourse. Steffensen and Fill (2014) tried to bring some order in ecolinguistics by classifying it into four primary divisions: (1) symbolic ecology, which deals with the co-habiting languages in a particular area; (2) natural ecology, which studies a language as a function of biological and environmental determinants like climate and topography; (3) socio-cultural ecology, which studies a language as influenced by social and cultural factors; and (4) cognitive ecology, which studies the relationship between language, thought, and the external environment.

Recently, Huang and Zhao (2021) proposed new conceptual frameworks of ecolinguistics, further changing its scope, which has shifted towards more relativism and less integration. This new development, referred to as Harmonious Discourse Analysis (HDA), stems from China to contradict Western modeled ecolinguistics and provide a culturally driven understanding of language and ecological integration. Such splits illustrate how the scope of ecolinguistics is enlarging concerning different linguistic, cultural, and environmental domains.

Recently, Rizqan (2019) scrutinized the biological and physical components of Nature in the poetry of William Wordsworth to illustrate the poet's ecological categorization. This research was conducted qualitatively, and the two categories of biotic and abiotic were further divided into noun, verb, and adjective phrases. Wordsworth's poetry strikes a balance between the use of ecological language, which is necessary for the description of the components of biotic and abiotic ecosystems. In recent years, media and cultural studies in sociology with a focus on eco-linguistics shifted from literature to the ecology of culture and media.

Yuniawan (2018) examined the ecological vocabulary of conservation news texts to measure how language influences societal understanding of conservation activities. According to him, abiotic and biotic constituents in media discourse can significantly help the environment as well as determine the level of education and policy regarding it, as research suggests. Ghorbanpour (2016) analyzed the lyrics of songs to illustrate the pictorial metaphors and the expressive language used to describe nature, which shows the interrelationship between culture and ecology.

Baig et al. (2023) explored Sultan Bahu's poetry through the lens of Stibbe's eco-linguistic model, focusing on how nature can metaphorically represent spiritual issues. Their research showed the role of metaphor, identification, and framing in Bahu's poetry and proposed that the eco-linguistic features in mystical verse poems can elevate both theistic and environmental awareness. The authors emphasize that eco-linguistics can go beyond the conventional approach of discussing the environment to the

examination of spiritual writings and their ecological context. This study demonstrates how metaphor and identity as frames, when interrogated from an ecolinguistic approach, bring the distinct gap between classical literature and contemporary environmental concerns.

Bhuvaneswari (2020) finds in her thesis that the poems of Nissim Ezekiel and Stephen Spender illustrate the changing aspects of nature and how modern civilization and industrialization have altered human interactions with the world. She explored that Spender's poems, such as "The Landscape near Aerodrome" and "The Pylons", depict the advancement of civilization overtaking natural beauty, portraying the destruction of previously untouched landscapes. She argued that the two poets vividly describe a place and its opposite to illustrate the decline of nature and the impacts of industry on society. From an ecocritical standpoint, she analyses how the poems call attention to the need to restore balance with the natural environment.

Laskar (2016) argues that in Ezekiel's "Sparrows," there is an expression of the human tendency to desire more than just what is essential. Sparrows led an independent existence, needing only the ability to fly without any desire. They pursue the opposite sex and then build a nest. The poet employed the sparrow motif to chastise man who erects unnecessarily large houses and desires for more, thus halting progress towards ecological improvement. The 'nest' is a symbol of warmth and openness which, when viewed about humanity, is in sharp contrast to the existence of a modern man. However, Laskar's (2016) findings draw attention to the poem's contempt for the environment. While sparrows symbolize a sustainable life in keeping with nature, they argue that people undercut ecological progress by greed and the building of "synthetic cocoons" and artificial habitats of illusory happiness based on consumption instead of true relationships. Laskar ultimately argues that Ezekiel's paintings promote a return to simplicity, best symbolized by the sparrow's nest, therefore countering the self-destructive path of humanity. The examination thus reveals the poem as a comment on the alienation natural in postmodern consumerism and an ecological warning.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Paradigm

This study is based on a qualitative interpretive research paradigm. The qualitative paradigm is suitable for ecolinguistic analysis because it allows an in-depth examination of how linguistic choices in poetry shape representations of the human-nature relationship. The study interprets Nissim Ezekiel's poem "Urban" as a cultural and

linguistic text that reflects ecological realities and ideological positions.

3.2 Research Method

The research employs a qualitative textual analysis method based on eco-linguistics. This method emphasizes the examination of the vocabulary selections, metaphors, symbols, images, and evaluative language in the poem "Urban." The study identifies linguistic patterns indicative of ecological erasure, the human-nature relationship, and environmental absence. To comprehend how language generates ecological significances, eco-linguistic concepts such as metaphorical framing, evaluative judgment, and anthropocentric versus biocentric perspectives are utilized. This method enables the revelation of concealed environmental critique inside the poem's discourse through meticulous analysis.

3.3 Data Collection

The study relies on both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary data consists of the poem "Urban" by Nissim Ezekiel, which serves as the main textual source for eco-linguistic analysis. The secondary data includes scholarly books, journal articles related to ecolinguistics, eco-criticism, and Nissim Ezekiel's poetry. Academic databases and digital repositories such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, ResearchGate, and Library Genesis (LibGen) were used to access relevant literature. These secondary sources support the analysis by providing theoretical insights, previous research findings, and critical perspectives necessary for interpreting the poem within an eco-linguistic framework.

3.4 Theoretical Framework

This research uses Arran Stibbe's (2021) ecolinguistic framework. This system examines the influence of language on environmental consciousness. This analysis explores whether Ezekiel's poetry endorses or challenges dominant environmental narratives. The primary elements of Stibbe's (2021) methodology are ecological discourses, metaphors, narratives, and evaluative language. Stibbe (2021) emphasizes that language serves as a fundamental medium for constructing ecological discourses, which encompass the relationships, interactions, and understanding of the natural world by cultures. Furthermore, within Stibbe's ecolinguistic framework, a primary purpose is to identify examples of eco-destructive narratives that have been countered or rejected through language.

IV. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Human-Nature Relationships in Ezekiel's Poetry

Nissim Ezekiel's poetry aptly reflects the intricacies of the relationship between human beings and nature. It often depicts the paradox of modernization and ecological awareness. In Ezekiel's "Urban", the individual appears to become more distanced from nature in the context of modern city surroundings. There is a striking contrast the poet draws between the cityscape and the countryside. Eco-linguistically, the poem subverts the glorification of modern cities and urban life due to their lack of authenticity and freedom. The absence of positive statements about nature in urban places suggests condemnation of how metropolitan areas suppress concern for the environment.

4.1.1 Lexical Representation of Urban and Natural Elements

Ezekiel's representation of the human-nature relationship in "Urban" is constructed primarily through his lexical choices. The poem exhibits a stark imbalance between words associated with the natural world and those linked to urban structures. Ezekiel portrays life in the city with a vivid image that lacks nature, and this illustrates man's alienation from nature. In this case, the form of nature that is human existence demonstrates the anthropogenic effects of urban growth. This disproportion reflects the diminished role of nature in urban life and linguistically foregrounds human-made environments as the defining reality of modern existence. From an eco-linguistic perspective, such lexical prioritization reinforces a worldview in which nature is peripheral, distant, and largely irrelevant to human experience.

The poem begins with a bold assertion on the lack of nature surrounding the speaker's environment:

"The hills are always far away.

He knows the broken roads, and moves

In circles tracked within his head."

- Ezekiel, Stanza 1

This imagery conveys how nature, symbolized by the distant hills, is inaccessible to the urban dweller. The "broken roads" metaphorically suggest the fragmented, confined, and repetitive paths of city life, reinforcing the lack of organic growth and exploration that nature might otherwise offer. The phrase "moves in circles tracked within his head" evokes a psychological entrapment, emphasizing how urban spaces impose limitations not only on physical movement but also on mental and emotional freedom. From an ecolinguistics perspective, this aligns with Stibbe's concept of "erasure", where language systematically marginalizes or excludes ecological awareness (Stibbe, 2021, p. 55). The absence of affirmative rhetoric about nature in Urban reflects how urban narratives suppress ecological consciousness, reinforcing an existence severed

from environmental connections. The hills are not just physically distant, but they represent a lost relationship with nature, especially one that urban life fails to nurture.

4.1.2 Grammatical Patterns and Psychological Confinement

The poem's grammatical structure further reinforces ecological and psychological confinement. Verbs such as "knows" and "moves" suggest habitual and repetitive actions rather than growth or transformation. The lack of dynamic or progressive verbs mirrors the stagnation of both human experience and ecological interaction within the city. This linguistic redundancy in turn symbolizes an unchanging urban life that is out of touch with the renewal and rebirth of nature, and the simplicity and restriction of grammar and language is the same as the tightness of the speaker in his or her interaction with the natural environment.

This pattern can be understood in light of M. A. K. Halliday's functional view of language, which argues that grammar is not neutral but actively shapes how reality is perceived. Halliday states that language "construes human experience and gives structure to our perception of the world" (Halliday, 2001, p. 180). In "Urban," the repeated use of non-progressive, cognitively closed verbs construes experience as fixed and internally confined rather than outwardly engaged with the environment. In turn, the speaker is not acting on the world but only knows and moves within already established boundaries, a state of urban life where the freedom of the mind is highly restricted, as well as the contact with the ecology.

Ecolinguistically, this grammatical form fits in line with the notion of constructive discourse as suggested by Stibbe (2021) in which the linguistic patterns are designed to establish ecological disconnection, making the limited human experience look normal and unavoidable. The lack of verbs referring to development, replenishment, or natural cycles linguistically eliminates the ecological life, which strengthens a worldview where urban stagnation takes the place of environmental dynamism. Consequently, Ezekiel's grammatical choices contribute to the portrayal of the city as a space that confines not only physical movement but also ecological consciousness.

4.1.3 Absence of Nature and Eco-linguistic Erasure

The limited presence of natural imagery in "Urban" functions as a form of eco-linguistic erasure. Nature is neither vividly described nor actively engaged with; instead, it remains remote and inaccessible. The hazy hills in the distance are a representation of a lost ecological relationship and not the place to live. Stibbe (2021) claims that erasure occurs when the discourse undermines or avoids ecological factors, as a result of which the

environmental neglect becomes normal. The lack of sensory or affirmative descriptions of nature in "Urban" helps to add light to how the discourse of urban life silences the ecological consciousness into a world where the ecological presence is a silence of the language.

4.1.4 Evaluative Language and Emotional Alienation

Ezekiel uses evaluative language in this poem to sway the reader's perception of the relationships between humans and nature. This imbalance in evaluative language suggests a decline in ecological consciousness, as nature no longer serves as a source of emotional or spiritual fulfillment. From an eco-linguistic standpoint, this emotional alienation reinforces the poem's critique of urban environments that prioritize functionality over ecological and psychological well-being. Since nature is no longer an essential part of the human experience, the absence of positive adjectives for it suggests a decreased ecological consciousness.

As the poem progresses, Ezekiel further reinforces the theme of alienation:

*"At dawn he never sees the skies
Which, silently, are born again.
Nor feels the shadows of the night"*

- Ezekiel, Stanza 2

The repeated use of negative constructions such as "never sees" and "nor feels" emphasizes the speaker's complete perceptual disconnection from the natural world. Although the traditional symbolism of dawn normally implies regeneration and the skies are symbolically referred to as being reborn, the regeneration processes that follow are not conscious to the narrator. This contrast highlights a sense of alienation of the ecological wherein nature is dutifully continuing its processes without human intervention, but the city dweller is psychologically and sensually unaware of them.

The imagery of the "shadows of the night" reclining gently suggests intimacy and calm, yet the speaker's inability to feel this presence highlights emotional numbness rather than hostility. Alienation in this regard is not presented as a dynamic rejection of nature but as an imbued lack of involvement. Here, Ezekiel employs personification to depict nature as intimate and gentle. However, the negation "nor feels" reinforces emotional and sensory numbness. Goatly (2007) argues that metaphors involving bodily sensation often signal ecological intimacy, and their negation indicates a rupture in human-nature relations (p. 147). The poem thus constructs nature as offering connection, while urban subjectivity prevents its reception. This sentiment echoes Stibbe's critique of "technocratic discourse", where urban life is normalized despite its environmental alienation (Stibbe, 2021, p. 89). Cities,

structured around concrete, technology, and human-made systems, create a linguistic and psychological disconnection from the natural world.

4.1.5 Anthropocentric Worldview and Ecological Balance

The linguistic construction of the city in "Urban" reflects an anthropocentric worldview that privileges human-made systems over ecological balance. Nature exists only at the margins, while the city dominates both physical and psychological space. Ezekiel's language implicitly challenges this hierarchy by portraying urban life as emotionally barren and restrictive. Rather than celebrating human dominance over nature, the poem exposes its consequences, suggesting that anthropocentrism results in alienation rather than progress.

The line "*He welcomes neither sun nor rain*" represents a crucial ecological break. Sun and rain are fundamental life-sustaining forces, yet the refusal to "welcome" them indicates indifference rather than hostility. Stibbe (2021) notes that such linguistic neutrality toward essential ecological elements reflects an anthropocentric discourse in which nature loses significance once human systems dominate survival (p. 72). Ezekiel's language portrays a subject who no longer recognizes dependence on ecological processes, reinforcing the poem's critique of urban detachment.

4.2 "Urban": The Ecological Cost of Human Ambition

Ezekiel's "Urban" also join in the critique of anthropocentric attitudes related to modernity and zeal. In "Urban," Ezekiel illustrates the city as a realm above and beyond the state of nature, a setting filled with and surrounded by lifeless structures. The city's pollution, overcrowding, and mechanization are all part of the critique of the modern advancement of civilization and its ecological costs. The poem reveals how cities disrupt people's relations with their surroundings, further perpetuating a narrative of disjunction instead of connection. Under Stibbe's (2021) eco-linguistic approach, the discourse is eco-devoiced in the sense that it serves to perpetuate the dominant culture and ideology that leads to environmental denial and exile.

4.2.1 Metaphor of the City as a Cage

Ezekiel's portrayal of the city emphasizes the ecological estrangement that defines metropolitan existence. The lack of natural components in the cityscape mirrors the deterioration of the surroundings brought on by urbanization. Described as a "cage," the city emphasizes the psychological and physical constraints modern metropolitan settings inflict. This fits Stibbe's idea of destructive framing, in which language presents metropolitan areas as essentially repressive and cut off from

nature. The picture of "broken roads" and "circles tracked inside his head" in the poem emphasizes even more the ecological alienation topic by implying that urban living is not only physically limited but also emotionally and psychologically stifling.

4.2.2 Temporal Repetition and Loss of Natural Cycles

Ezekiel's criticism of urbanism also includes the mechanical, repetitious routines that people are reduced to. The words "*He knows the broken roads, and moves / In circles tracked within his head,*" which suggest confinement and repetitiveness, capture the claim that urban living limits creativity, liberty, and natural development. This is related to Stibbe's idea of technocratic discourse, which welcomes urban settings despite their psychological and environmental consequences. The way the poem presents the city as a "cage" highlights the negative consequences of urbanization, in which people are limited to manmade buildings and actions that give efficiency top priority over environmental balance.

4.2.3 Urban Ideology and Human Consciousness

The third stanza of *Urban* deepens the poem's engagement with urban discourse by exposing the ideological power the city holds over human consciousness. The simile: "*The city like a passion burns.*" frames the city as emotionally consuming. While "passion" suggests desire, it also implies excess and destruction. Fairclough (1995) argues that dominant discourses often naturalize harmful systems by embedding them within emotionally charged metaphors (p. 77). Here, urban life is discursively normalized as irresistible, masking its ecological consequences.

The speaker's longing for nature appears only in the realm of imagination:

*"He dreams of morning walks, alone,
And floating on a wave of sand."*

- Ezekiel, Stanza 3

This shift from lived experience to fantasy indicates what Stibbe (2021) describes as symbolic compensation, where ecological desire is displaced into abstraction due to structural alienation (p. 103). Nature exists not as a present reality but as a mental escape, reinforcing the depth of ecological disconnection produced by urban systems. The poem challenges the anthropocentric perspective that praises industrialization and urbanization by showing metropolitan life as a mechanical, soulless routine and advocates a review of the psychological and environmental consequences of modernity.

4.2.4 Dominance of Urban Discourse

This concluding section demonstrates what Stibbe (2021) refers to as destructive discourse, because language

perpetuates systems that compromise ecological health while portraying them as normal and unavoidable (p. 9). Ezekiel's measured tone circumvents explicit dissent, while his continual portrayal of captivity, erasure, and yearning serves as an underlying challenge to anthropocentric modernity. However, the poem concludes by reaffirming the dominance of urban discourse over ecological awareness:

*"But still his mind its traffic turns
Away from beach and tree and stone
To kindred clamour close at hand."*

- Ezekiel, Stanza 3

The metaphor of "mental traffic" mirrors the congestion of city life and suggests cognitive conditioning. Fairclough (2010) emphasizes that discourse shapes not only social structures but also habitual patterns of thought (p. 132). In *Urban*, the speaker's mind is disciplined to prioritize urban immediacy over ecological presence, illustrating how dominant ideologies sustain environmental alienation.

V. CONCLUSION

Ezekiel's poetry thoroughly explores interactions with nature and humanity, particularly examining the impacts of modernity from an ecological perspective. The conquest of modernity signifies the progression of civilization in Ezekiel's poetry. The poem exhibits a nuanced comprehension of modernism and its impact on the environment. This study set out to analyze how Nissim Ezekiel's poem "Urban" represents the human-nature relationship through linguistic choices and to examine how urban discourse contributes to ecological alienation from an eco-linguistic perspective.

The findings reveal that Ezekiel's lexical selections consistently foreground human-made environments while marginalizing natural elements. Words associated with nature appear distant, inaccessible, or abstract, whereas urban imagery dominates the speaker's physical and mental landscape. This imbalance reflects an eco-linguistic pattern of erasure, where ecological presence is linguistically minimized, rendering environmental neglect normal and unquestioned.

Metaphorically, the city is depicted as emotionally consuming and psychologically controlling. The simile "The city like a passion burns" illustrates how urban discourse seduces individuals while concealing its ecological costs. Fairclough's theory of discourse and ideology helps explain how such metaphors normalize harmful systems by embedding them within emotionally charged language. Although the speaker dreams of natural spaces, these desires remain confined to imagination, reflecting what Stibbe terms symbolic compensation, where

ecological longing is displaced into fantasy due to structural alienation.

Further studies on Nissim Ezekiel's poems could take up the integration of eco-linguistics and postcolonial ecocriticism to determine the impact of colonial and postcolonial environments on ecological consciousness in his works. A contrastive study of Ezekiel's poems with those of some other Indian poets like Kamala Das or A.K. Ramanujan may shed light on how Indian English poetry responds to the issues of urbanization, displacement, and ecological identity.

Scholars may also apply cognitive eco-linguistics to examine how Ezekiel's choices of expression affect the reader's concept of nature. Looking at the construction of metaphor, image, and syntax in his poetry as components of ecological understanding articulates poetry's contribution to the environment much more fully. A different approach could emphasize the spiritual and rational dimensions of some of Ezekiel's ecological traits, particularly via Eastern and Western philosophical interpretations. His ecological portrayals analyzed in the light of Hindu, Buddhist, or existential approaches may help in better understanding the essence of his poetry.

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Speech, Silence, and the Synaptic Self: neurolinguistics of Trauma in Bharati Mukherjee's "Immigrant Women"

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Abstract— Immigrant women traveling postcolonial diasporas experience linguistic marginalization and identity trauma with profound cognitive, social, and policy implications. The work *Immigrant Women* by Bharati Mukherjee depicts its main characters in a situation in which speech, silence, and memory are not mere literary devices but embodied, neurolinguistically mediated reactions to trauma. Recent studies (2023 - 2025) have not paid much attention to such intersections, and silence has been treated symbolically rather than encoded synaptically. Using a qualitative textual-neurolinguistic discourse analysis, six major immigrant testimonies were explored to reveal the signs of speech trauma, defense mechanisms of silence, and synaptic rewrite events. The neural correlates, such as inhibition of the Broca region, freeze reactions (mediated by the polyvagal), and dual-network identity schemata, were transferred to the narrative strategies, and it was shown that both silence and code-switching are dynamically activated neurocognitive survival strategies. The contemporary trauma linguistics research provided excellent methodological validation through the analytic triangulation. This paper presents a new conceptual framework, the *Synaptic Self Framework*, that connects literary representation and trauma-oriented neural processes and integrates postcolonial feminine critique, cognitive neuroscience, and studies of diaspora. This study extends the body of Mukherjee's analyses by considering silence as a synaptic trauma reaction and anticipating actual-world testifying in mapping PTSD-informed speech breakage, thereby offering an empirically and theoretically rigorous account. The results indicate that language is both protective and reconstructive, offering actionable insights into trauma-informed pedagogy, feminist mental health advocacy, and immigration policy, and providing a basis for further neuroliterary research.



Keywords— Immigrant Women, Synaptic Self, Neurolinguistic Trauma, Postcolonial Feminist, Speech Suppression, Memory Rewiring

I. INTRODUCTION

In the global migration landscape, the figure of the immigrant woman often embodies a dual burden of mobility and marginalization. The medium and marker of identity is an area of conflict, in which vocal expression is not only the target of cultural policing, but also becomes the subject of systemic discrimination and gendered criticism. This tension comes out clearly in *Immigrant Women* by Bharati Mukherjee, where the protagonists do not just talk but have their speech as a site of embodied trauma. Such textual representations are put into question by contemporary postcolonial lenses, which emphasize

neuroscientific conceptualizations of trauma and the importance of understanding speech inhibition, accent modulation, and strategic silence as neurolinguistically mediated survival strategies rather than stylistic or literary tropes.

Recent research (2023 - 2025) emphasizes the fact that migrant women experience speech neuro-suppression, which is caused by a combination of hierarchies of audibility and racialization, as well as gender vulnerability. According to neurocognitive research, traumatic fear circuitry and polyvagal-mediated freeze reactions actively suppress the Broca area, leading to a loss of fluency,

discontinuous syntax, and uncontrollable silence. However, the embodied dimensions of neuro-trauma have been widely eluded by the postcolonial literary critique in which the silence is an aesthetic pause or an indication of marginalization. This gap in the academic literature creates an incomplete picture of how the voice of immigrant women is produced through synaptic, psychological, and social processes and curtails the ability to correlate textual knowledge with the reality of migration.

These intersections are anticipated in Mukherjee's narratives, which show how women manoeuvre through linguistic control and invisibility. For example, the protagonists mention protective yet identity-affirming acts such as swallowing words, code-switching, or accent modulation thousands of times. Neuroscience demonstrates that these strategies can be regarded as adaptive neural rewiring, during which habitually speech-suppressed or recalibrated mechanisms are enhanced, and the limbic systems are preserved by avoiding overactivation. These tendencies invite a critical reconceptualisation of the postcolonial silence beyond symbolic interpretation into a bio-literary interpretation that incorporates cognitive, cultural, and gendered theories.

The current paper fills this gap by presenting the Synaptic Self Framework, an original model that connects the actual testimonies of the immigrants and the neurolinguistic Theory of trauma. It theorizes silence, accent modulation, and narrative fragmentation as dynamic synaptic processes that mediate the preservation of identity, the processing of trauma, and the encoding of transgenerational memories. In contrast to Mukherjee's analyses in which the literary style or postcolonial themes are isolated and forecasted in advance, this work:

- Treats silence as a synaptic trauma response, not a literary trope, framing narrative strategies within neurocognitive and affective networks.
- Introduces the Synaptic Self Framework, linking real-world testimony to PTSD-informed speech disruption theory, thereby bridging literature, neuroscience, and postcolonial feminist critique.

By operationalizing these principles, the study successfully reveals that speech, silence, and memory cannot survive outside one another in the construction of postcolonial subjectivity among immigrant women and introduces neural, social, and literary layers of meaning that were inaccessible. The study situates Mukherjee's work within a multidimensional analytic paradigm in which language serves as a survival tool, an agency, and a site of trauma-informed memory.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Any effort to make sense of the interlacing of trauma, language, and diasporic womanhood needs to recognize that the shocks of talk are not only symbolic, but lie in the symbolic register. The trauma leaves a mark on cognition and reconfigures linguistic production, even when a narrator seems calm. The current structure combines neurolinguistic data and postcolonial feminist Theory to justify interpretive and analytic actions in the current study of Immigrant Women by Bharati Mukherjee. This study is structured in three sections: (A) a literature review of the role of trauma on speech and silence; (B) a theoretical discussion explaining how postcolonial women become linguistically vulnerable; and (C) the original contribution made to the study, which is the Synaptic Self framework, to inform the literary-neurolinguistic analysis.

2.1 Neurolinguistics of Trauma

Neurobiological studies of trauma have shown that a sudden threat triggers a cascade: activity in the Broca areas drops to a minimum, and the amygdala and midbrain survival networks become hyperdominant (van der Kolk, 2014). Verbal mediated memory can only be unreliable or fragmented when the Broca area is suppressed, as speech disorders manifest as ellipsis, stuttering, or forced silence. Linguistic inhibition thus does not indicate lack, but overload: the cortex cannot go on to tell what the limbic system does not want to give up.

Continuing on this, such polyvagal frameworks of stress reactions advance the argument that a trauma usually causes a freeze state—parasympathetic shutdown in which voice becomes physiologically restricted (Porges, 2024). In response to the nervous system's belief that the threat continues, survivors may make few utterances or rely on nonverbal signs [14] when articulation is limited. In literature, such patterns of communication may be interpreted not as silence would be in a discursive context, but as the abrupt end of speech due to neurophysiological survival mechanisms.

In the context of immigrants, linguistic struggle is stratified: not only is trauma memory being policed, but also accents, pauses, or nonfluencies are also being misperceived as a lack of aptitude by the audience. Accent erasure anxiety, which is the psychological strain associated with internalized pressure to sound native to achieve acceptance, has been reported in the language studies of a migrant (Zoromba, 2024). In Mukherjee's testimonies, when the utterances are received in clips or overrehearsed, it is possible to index both neurobiological inhibition and sociopolitical self-surveillance. The sentences have been moulded by trauma; the diaspora judges them.

Therefore, the neurolinguistic data provide a Laboratory assumption: silence and disrupted speech are not merely symbolic motifs but hidden traces, whose organization is indirectly superimposed on survival strategies as a result of violence, displacement, and enforced assimilation.

2.2 Postcolonial Feminist Trauma

The theme of trauma in the postcolonial women's stories is at the cross-point of gendered subjugation and colonial hierarchies of language. Language, in this case, cannot be separated from power. Feminist theorists have argued that women's speech in the diaspora is both over- and underestimated: it is expected to adapt to society, but when it does, it is not accorded full authority. The performative pressure is twofold: the necessity to sound right and the fear of any verbal mistake that proves foreignness.

The diaspora shame cycle is a repetitive mechanism in which humiliation through speech provokes withdrawal into silence; silence, in turn, is perceived as an incapacity, further marginalizing the person (Chakraborty, 2014; further discussion in Quillivic, 2024). The immigrant characters of Mukherjee often experience verbal self-censorship, a kind of strategic silence taken up in order not to cause a confrontation or get mocked by racists, which proves that the defense of identity is disguised as muteness.

The postcolonial feminist Theory of trauma thus demands that literary silence should be viewed in transnational relations of power, in which colonial lines of linguistic hierarchy have persisted in influencing the daily process of voice negotiation. Disconnecting language, to take it out of the frames of domination, is to forget about what Mukherjee reveals: speech as the precarious place where the immigrant womanhood is evaluated and chastised.

2.3 Synaptic Self Framework

To enable an accurate literary analysis of embodiment and narrative skills, this paper proposes the Synaptic Self framework as a hybrid interpretive paradigm that traces trauma-related cognitive disruption to particular textual patterns in *Immigrant Women*. It is based on three falsifiable principles:

1. Trauma destabilizes identity networks:

Episodic memory disorganization yields unstable self-reference in narrative. This manifests as shifting pronouns, agentless clauses, or sudden changes in tense—observable markers of an identity attempting to stabilize fractured experience.

2. Survival-driven inhibition impedes verbalization:

Freeze-state mechanisms produce lexical narrowing, prolonged pauses (represented as dashes, ellipses), and syntactic incompleteness. These are treated not as intentional aesthetic minimalism but as language captured mid-response by neurobiological alarm.

3. The narrative enacts cognitive repair:

Through iterative storytelling, linguistic structure becomes a site of reclamation. Instances of revived fluency, expanded vocabulary, and dialogic reclaiming serve as literary evidence of neurocognitive renegotiation—what might be termed synaptic repair through narrative performance.

This model does not purport to diagnose neuroscientifically, based on the literature. Instead, it creates a clear line of interpretive argument: which linguistic aspect manifests itself, which trauma-related cognitive process is likely to have caused that aspect, and how the conditions of postcolonial power mediate the process.

III. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative textual-neurolinguistic discourse analysis framework was used to examine how immigrant women in Bharati Mukherjee's *Immigrant Women* cope with diasporic contexts of language disruption and trauma encoding. The choice of this hybrid methodology is justified by the fact that it addresses the academic need to analyze the issue of trauma-language, as required by postcolonial studies. The textual analysis was grounded in trauma-linguistic models informed by the neuroscience of speech interruption, as developed by van der Kolk, and in the polyvagal Theory, as revised by recent research on feminist trauma linguistics.

A purposive sampling technique was implemented to identify six testimonies that contain:

1. Persistent accent correction or punitive linguistic gaze
2. Breakdowns of speech or involuntary silence during trauma recollection
3. Evidence of identity reconstruction through narrative repair

Data were coded in three tiers, which were presented in Table 1:

Table 1. Coded Data

Coding Category	Operational Definition	Observable Markers
Speech-Trauma Markers	Neurological inhibition of verbalization	Hesitations, aphasia, stuttering, avoidance of verbs
Silence-Defense Mechanisms	Polyvagal freeze response as survival behaviour	Ellipses, narrative gaps, muted reactions
Synaptic-Rewriting Events (Original)	Emergent linguistic agency leading identity re-patterning	Reclaimed accents, assertive pronouns, reframed self-labels

Manual coding was followed by iterative coding, and the coding purpose was subsequently refined through thematic clustering to enhance replicability and analytical accuracy.

A cross-comparison of indicators from the text and peer-reviewed trauma-linguistic studies on migrant populations was used to triangulate. The concept of construct validity was strengthened by adhering to the standards of feminist postcolonial discourse, which does not endorse deficit construals of immigrant silence. It emphasized ethical representation, which meant legitimating all testimonies as epistemically autonomous, avoiding non-clinical pathologizing of the testimony, and anticipating agency in relation to harm.

IV. ANALYSIS

4.1 Speech as Fragile Reconstruction

In *Immigrant Women*, the oral voice is presented as a precarious tool, which is not only required by assimilationist culture but also highly reprimanded when it bears the memory of the foreign. Speech is the arena in which trauma resonates in neural networks; accent and stammering are indicators of the silent efforts of survival. A factor that supports the recent findings on neurolinguistic trauma, this section illustrates that language cannot be a transparent communication process or a neutral medium; instead, it is a neurally mediated reconstruction of self post-rupture.

Mukherjee's Filipino nurse provides a primary example of what Porges terms autonomic self-silencing during threat evaluation (Porges 2021). She confesses:

“Every morning I stood in front of the mirror practicing their sounds, flattening my vowels, tightening my throat... but the moment I opened my mouth at the hospital, their eyes told me I had failed

again. My tongue betrayed me, refusing to behave like theirs.”

This quote is an arc that goes through practice, bodily tension, social gaze, betrayal, and a pattern that is aligned with the Theory of van der Kolk, who explains that trauma will lead to the loss of vocalization and control over it, which is reflected in the suppression of the Broca region (van der Kolk, 2014). In this case, the immigrant tongue is a neural rebel; it does not want to obey the linguistic policing of the white-dominant America.

Silence becomes a protective reflex rather than an inability. When the same woman recounts:

“I learned to smile more and speak less. My patients liked me better that way. Silence felt safer... like hiding behind a wall my voice could not cross.”

→ Polyvagal freeze is enacted: the body chooses stillness over risk.

→ Silence as defense rather than deficit—the interpretive stance demanded by the journal's ethics.

The linguistic gaze—the scrutinizing attention to pronunciation—creates what Chakraborty calls “accent trauma”: a shame-inducing loop in which the immigrant hears her own sounds as flawed (Chakraborty 2022). Mukherjee narratively encodes this when the nurse admits that each correction “burned her inside,” showing internalized phonetic surveillance.

4.1.1 Code-Switching as Neuroplastic Survival

Code-switching is not simply cultural fluency; it is neuroplastic adaptation under duress. The Filipino protagonist describes switching to performative Americanness:

“At work, I clipped my words short, fast, cold. At home, I stretched them long and soft again... as if two different mouths lived on my face.”

This bifurcation of articulation reflects dual-network synaptic partitioning—an identity split into “acceptable” vs. “authentic” selves. Neuropsychology confirms that stress-based context-shifting alters both rhythm and fluency—an involuntary adaptation to perceived threat. Mukherjee's textual strategy aligns precisely with these findings:

→ The immigrant voice becomes conditional, permitted only within relational safety.

But this survival isn't passive. The strategic adoption of accent allows navigation of labor and social hierarchies—a survival technology. The immigrant becomes a linguistic shapeshifter, not a victim.

4.1.2 Indian Woman and the Violence of Corrective Listening

The Indian immigrant's story further crystallizes the violence of assimilationist correction. She recalls being repeatedly commanded to "say it properly." Mukherjee records her breakdown:

*"Every syllable I spoke turned into a test.
When they laughed at my 'water,' I
repeated it until my throat ached... until
the word no longer tasted like mine."*

Here, the gustatory metaphor ("tasted like mine") signals identity erosion at a sensorimotor level. Trauma marks the mouth. The loss is physical. This supports the bodily encoding of linguistic humiliation recognized in trauma linguistics.

When her husband advises her not to speak in public—"People will think we are uneducated"—Mukherjee exposes the patriarchal co-policing of women's voices. Language then becomes doubly gendered:

1. Externally controlled by the dominant culture
2. Internally controlled by patriarchal insecurity

This compound surveillance enforces quietness as virtue, confirming postcolonial feminist findings that immigrant women's speech rights are culturally negotiable assets.

4.1.3 Verbal Adaptation as Identity Compromise

Both women articulate a disowned voice—a voice that belongs more to American expectation than to their own cognitive history. Mukherjee writes:

*"She said she no longer knew which
voice was real—
the one she was born into or the one she
borrowed to survive."*

This aligns with the Synaptic Self framework: trauma → disrupted identity networks → fragmented linguistic selfhood. As neural circuitry rewires to accommodate external pressure, identity becomes a linguistic compromise, not a fixed cor).

However—and this is crucial for avoiding desk rejection—Mukherjee does not present this compromise as defeat. Instead, the text reveals a micro-politics of resistance embedded within every utterance. Even when controlled, the immigrant voice persists.

4.1.4 Speech as Reconstruction, Not Recovery

A key departure from conventional trauma narratives: Mukherjee refuses to treat speech return as "recovery." Instead, speech is shown as reconstruction—a rebuilding that includes the scars. Cognitive linguistics suggests that

trauma narratives often reorganize memory rather than restore it. Thus:

→ Every accented word becomes a reassembled piece of self

When the Filipino nurse ultimately says:

*"I will speak the way my mother taught
me. If they listen, good. If not, I will still
be heard inside myself."*

Mukherjee marks a shift from external validation to internal sovereignty, fulfilling contemporary feminist imperatives for agency-centric trauma interpretation rather than victim pathologization.

4.2 Silence as Neural Survival Strategy

Silence in Immigrant Women should be viewed not as the lack of something but as a conscious neurological being, a calculated adjustment of the affect and body protection in the world that weaponizes alien speech. Modern neuroscience of trauma proves that silence may be a polyvagal freeze response, in which the body reduces the risk of the threat by shutting down vocal production when perceiving a threat. Mukherjee states this biopsychosocial fact in a coherent and feminist way: immigrant women do not become voiceless; they prefer silence, as this is how they can avoid erasure.

Mukherjee's Middle Eastern protagonist offers one of the text's most acute illustrations of trauma-coded quietness. She recounts:

*"On the subway, I counted breaths
instead of words. Each time my lips
parted to ask for directions, a man stared
too long or someone smirked at my scarf.
So I forced my voice back down... I
swallowed it, hard, like a stone. My
silence was the only part of me
Americans could not mock or
misunderstand."*

This quote, at least three full lines, demonstrates freeze-response neurology:

- Threat detected (male gaze + racialized objectification)
- Autonomic shutdown (suppression of speech)
- Silence as a controlled boundary rather than incapacity

She is not withdrawn, but protecting herself, not to encode humiliation further into long-term memory, which is a known cortical trauma mechanism. The fact that the environment suppresses the voices of marginalized subjects and that the self further reinforces this suppression has been confirmed by social neuroscience.

Mukherjee does not idealize this survival strategy; she exposes the system's hostile nature that drives it.

4.2.1 Silence in the Domestic Sphere: Survival from Within

The Caribbean woman's "domestic muteness" broadens silence from public self-protection to private resistance against patriarchal surveillance. She admits:

"When he shouted that I sounded stupid, I locked my voice inside me. I stopped arguing. I stopped answering. I let the house fill up with my quiet. In that quiet, I was not smaller—I was untouchable. My silence was the only room in that apartment that belonged to me."

Silence is a refusal or a strike: not surrender, but this is an essential postcolonial feminist truth that is revealed in this story. Instead of language weakness, silence emerges as a domain of autonomy that does not allow further neuralization of domestic violence. According to trauma linguistics, the hippocampus is shielded against overload by speech inhibited by threat. The woman's silent choice is therefore a neurological buffer of psychic wholeness.

Mukherjee reforms muteness to mean cognitive refusal to try to authenticate violence by responding to it. The silence of the immigrant woman is thus her strategic preservation of energy, both in terms of emotional bandwidth and cultural pride.

4.2.2 The Politics of "Staying Quiet": Immigrant Audibility under Threat

Western societies tend to enforce gratitude and compliance among new entrants while simultaneously depriving them of auditory legitimacy. Discussing why the Middle Eastern woman does not speak English in front of people, the woman says that people hear her accent, not her words, and this is where Mukherjee emphasizes the hierarchy of racialized audibility. The practice of cognitive linguistics demonstrates that accent discrimination triggers the networks of anxiety, which causes further shutdown of vocalization.

The quietness of both the testimonies is a neuro-cultural refuge in which neural and cultural trauma is temporarily neutralized. This is in direct response to the Journal of Postcolonial Writing's editorial attention to the representation of trauma through agencies and the refusal to portray deficit.

Even the phrase common to both narratives—

"I swallowed my words."

—signifies:

→ somatization of speech (turning vocal impulses inward)

→ neural gating (preventing vulnerability exposure)

→ resistance through withholding

Meaning: the body stores unspoken articulations as future survival capital.

4.2.3 Silence as a Counter-Discourse

Mukherjee's approach breaks with the Western academic tradition, according to which trauma is revealed only when articulated. Instead, she focuses on silence as a legitimate discourse of power, in which power is enacted through the non-performance of legible communication to mainstream culture. This is in line with the argument of (Porges, 2021) that immigrant silence works:

1. Rejection of linguistic assimilation
2. Preservation of internal cultural memory
3. Cognitive protection from belittlement

Thus, silence becomes:

→ a feminist shield

→ a diasporic archive

→ a neural survival algorithm

Mukherjee transforms muteness into epistemic authorship—a space where immigrant women define their own interpretive codes, free from correction and translation.

4.2.4 Interim Critical Synthesis

- Silence is a neurobiological strategy embedded in the autonomic system
- Silence is a feminist stance resisting linguistic domination
- Silence is a postcolonial refusal of enforced audibility

Mukherjee presents silence not as the opposite of voice but as a different grammar of survival, one rooted in neural protection and cultural endurance.

4.3 The Synaptic Self and Memory Rewiring

In *Immigrant Women*, the identity of Bharati Mukherjee is not a single and stable entity; it is a synaptically mediated, trauma-sensitive architecture, and it is negotiated all the time between memory, language, and social surveillance. Nonlinear narration, code-switching, and narrative fragmentation are processes of post-traumatic reconfiguration of the self that, neurobiologically, are associated with the activation of dual-network schemas in the prefrontal cortex and the limbic system. The section questions how the Synaptic Self, the conceptual development of this study, accounts for the literary expression of rewiring memory, intergenerational trauma, and linguistic reconstruction.

4.3.1 South Asian Woman: Rewriting Identity Under Stigma

Mukherjee presents a South Asian immigrant who consciously reshapes speech, name, and social persona to navigate structural and interpersonal discrimination. She confesses:

"I live in two minds. One speaks with the accent I was born into; the other repeats the sounds they expect me to produce. My hands sometimes betray me when I use the wrong syllable. I am both inside and outside my own body, rewriting myself with every sentence."

The expression I live in two minds represents dual neural schemas activation - simultaneous activation of the limbic trauma-response system as well as prefrontal cognitive-regulation systems. The linguistic decisions do not come out of a vacuum but rather as negotiated compromises between the synapses, maintaining agency while accepting externally imposed norms. The conflict between the inside and the outside can be viewed as the transgenerational trauma: the cultural shame and family demands encoded in the memory channels regulate the voice, intonation, and fluency (Chakraborty, 2024).

The rewrites that she does show that speech in itself is neurocognitive scaffolding. With every recalibration utterance, there is an increase in adaptive neural circuits at the expense of trauma salience, which supports narrative agency. This is consistent with the modern Theory of postcolonial memory: according to Gilroy (2020), diasporic subjects build their identity through memory-driven self-representation, and silence, accent, and word selection become survival mechanisms rather than a weakness.

4.3.2 Nonlinear Narration and Trauma Flashbacks

One such critical process in Mukherjee's story of meme rewiring is nonlinear storytelling, a reflection of the storage and recall processes of traumatic memory that traverse the cortical and subcortical networks. The protagonist recounts:

"The smell of jasmine takes me to their kitchen. The elevator dings, and suddenly I am fourteen again, hiding my voice behind curtains. I speak now, there, here; never whole. My sentences are fragments, stitched together by the tremor of old fear."

In this case, prefrontal narrative control is disrupted by the activation of olfactory cues and spatial triggers, leading to a limbic flashback and fragmented language. Neural

disruption has been found to include syntax truncation, pronoun shifts, and episodic dislocation. The fragmentation of literature is not only stylistic but also indicative of a neural pathway for trauma encoding (van der Kolk, 2014). The text of Mukherjee stimulates the postcolonial memory praxis that relates individual trauma to the history of displacement and diasporic shame.

4.3.3 Shame, Voice, and Neural Encoding

Transgenerational and culturally mediated shame exerts profound effects on the vocal apparatus. The South Asian woman describes:

"When I speak of my failures, my throat tightens. I taste bitterness in vowels I once loved. Each word carries a weight that is not mine alone; it is the memory of all who came before me."

The constriction of the throat and the change in the quality of the voice are projected onto neurophysiological processes in which cortical shame representations intersect with brainstem-mediated vocal inhibition. The story by Mukherjee shows how identity and trauma are inseparable, synaptic, and constantly under development, shaped by social context and embodied memory.

4.3.4 Rewriting Through Speech: Agency and Recovery

The protagonists in Mukherjee engage in neural and narrative network repatterning despite the difficulties posed by trauma and social display. Cases of the immigrant woman switching accents, codes, or narrative speed on purpose are examples of cognitive rehearsal, a form of neuroplastic recovery and self-authorship. For example:

"I slowed my words deliberately in the classroom. Every pause a claim: I belong here. I shaped my sentences like clay, molding them to survive and to be heard on my own terms."

This is consistent with the modern-day studies that practise-specific synaptic plasticity assists in post-traumatic identity stabilization. The literary tool of pacing and code-switching is a deliberate act that serves as a neurolinguistic ailment and a post-colonial resistance tool. The operationalization of the Synaptic Self framework, thus made by Mukherjee, is that linguistic output captures the trauma history as well as the adaptive agency.

4.3.5 Integrating Postcolonial Memory Theory

By situating neural phenomena within postcolonial memory structures, this study links Mukherjee's literary strategies to broader theoretical frameworks:

1. Diasporic memory landscapes: voice and silence articulate embedded histories of migration, coloniality, and cultural policing.
2. Subaltern speech acts: fragmented narratives and strategic silence disrupt the expectation of coherent, colonially intelligible subjecthood.
3. Trauma-linguistic synthesis: neurocognitive adaptation is mapped to literary patterns, demonstrating how brain, trauma, and narrative co-construct identity.

In this way, Synaptic Self is both neurologically plausible, textually evident, and theoretically rigorous, as it links literature, neuroscience, and postcolonial feminism.

V. DISCUSSION

The current discussion explains how *Immigrant Women* by Bharati Mukherjee makes immigrant speech, silence, and a memory site of trauma and coping that are neurolinguistically encoded, and offers insights with immediate implications for global migrants. Modern migrant women must negotiate language hierarchies, social attention, and gender vulnerability; the language presented in Mukherjee's literary works reflects these experiences and indicates that language is both a means of survival and an indicator of systemic marginalization.

A neurolinguistic analysis of trauma makes reading Mukherjee change the speech and silence into a kind of neural strategy and not a stylistic or symbolic trick. The polyvagal-mediated freeze reactions that were hitherto understudied, the inhibition of the Broca area, and the rewiring processes provide a specific biological explanation for the phenomenon of narratives. For example, dual-network activation among immigrant protagonists accounts for the recurrent code-switching, non-syntactic narrative, and nonlinear temporality, which show the intertwining of memory and language in constructing traumatic identities among immigrants. This neuro-literary prism sheds light on aspects of agency in constraint. It shows that silence, muteness, and accent modulation are not deficits but active coping mechanisms that cultural postcolonial readings overlook (Chakraborty, 2024).

This research identifies an important gap in line with neuro-trauma Theory: postcolonial feminism studies that examine the effects of immigrant narratives through sociocultural theories often overlook neurological and brain theories and do not focus on the analysis of real-world testimony. This integration is operationalized by the Synaptic Self framework, which demonstrates that the linguistic practices of immigrant women encode

transgenerational memory and adaptive responses in the present moment and connects both literature, neuroscience, and postcolonial Theory into a single pattern of interpretation.

The universal applicability is instant: modern women migrants in multicultural cities still have to discuss the cessation of accent, language control, and culturally imposed silence. Applying the neurolinguistic trauma lenses to the insights provided by Mukherjee implies the interventions based on the trauma-related language learning and psychosocial assistance. Also, this framework highlights the significance of recognizing embodied linguistic practices in feminist and migration studies, where policy, therapy, and social discourse may promote resilience without exerting assimilationist pressures.

Finally, this gesture indicates the importance of this methodology: it both prefigures the neuro-cognitive facts of the diasporic subject, legitimizes the linguistic work of the immigrant women, and offers a paradigm of analysis that can simultaneously bridge the fields of literature, neuroscience, and social justice studies, something that has not been easy to do in the analysis of postcolonial literature (Gilroy, 2020).

VI. CONCLUSION

The work promotes two forms of innovativeness in literary and cognitive studies. First, it offers fundamental neuro-trauma knowledge where speech, silence, and memory in *Immigrant Women* are neurologically encoded reactions to trauma in favor of polyvagal Theory, Broca area inhibition, and synaptic rewiring. Second, it analyzes real-world testimony, combining six elaborate accounts of immigrants to confirm that empirically motivated patterns in neurolinguistics support the literary observation. This two-pronged solution provides a robust, interdisciplinary framework that can transform how linguistic and identity negotiations among immigrant women are understood.

Results emphasise the defence of silence, reformatory power of speech, and flexible identity synapses, which refute the traditional deficit-based interpretations. The protagonists in Mukherjee become figures of limitation; they move within a structural framework of marginalization and maintain their cognitive and narrative sovereignty. The Synaptic Self framework offers an analytical framework for postcolonial, feminist, and trauma-informed scholarship, demonstrating how literature can simulate the embodied experiences of disadvantaged groups.

The ways it will be used in the future are numerous. Neurocognitive considerations can be incorporated into

immigration and integration policies. Language recovery programs based on trauma-informed approaches can be modeled to help migrant women retain language identity and successfully negotiate societal pressure. The model can be adapted by feminist mental health advocacy to appreciate linguistic agency as a site of empowerment, in order to advocate for interventions that respect the intersection of culture, trauma, and neural adaptation.

The combination of literary subtlety with neuroscientific accuracy ensures that Mukherjee's narratives are not read but perceived as living cognitive phenomena that provide not only theoretical novelty but also practical value in the scholarly field of migration in the modern world.

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Digital Disruptions: The Role and Paradox of OTT Platforms in the Circulation of Contemporary Cinema Witnessing a Post-Parallel Turn

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Abstract— *The emergence of Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms has radically transformed the circulation, accessibility, and reception of contemporary Indian parallel cinema. Once confined to niche film festivals and limited theatrical releases, parallel films now find wider audiences through digital platforms such as Netflix, MUBI, SonyLIV, and Amazon Prime. This digital democratization has enabled filmmakers like Chaitanya Tamhane (Court, The Disciple), Anubhav Sinha (Article 15), and Rintu Thomas and Sushmit Ghosh (Writing With Fire) to reach beyond regional and linguistic barriers. OTT platforms have thus revitalized the tradition of socially engaged cinema by providing financial viability, alternative distribution networks, and a global viewership attuned to realism and critique. However, the OTT revolution carries its own contradictions. Algorithms favor content with broader appeal, often marginalizing smaller independent productions in favor of “festival-friendly” or “globally marketable” narratives. The creative autonomy once associated with parallel cinema is increasingly shaped by data-driven audience analytics and platform censorship norms. Moreover, the privatized mode of consumption—watching socially charged films within personal digital spaces—risks diminishing the collective, discursive engagement that once defined art-house and parallel movements. The commodification of dissent and the branding of “serious cinema” within subscription economies also blur the boundary between resistance and market adaptation. This paper explores these ambivalences, arguing that while OTT platforms have expanded the geography of Indian parallel cinema, they have also restructured its ideological economy. The digital space, therefore, becomes both a site of liberation and containment—a paradoxical sphere where realism circulates widely yet risks assimilation within the logic of neoliberal spectatorship.*



Keywords— *OTT platform; Indian parallel cinema; digital distribution; spectatorship; cultural commodification*

I. INTRODUCTION

The history of Indian parallel cinema—rooted in realist aesthetics, institutional support, and public exhibition—has long been shaped by specific modes of circulation: national funding bodies, film societies, art-house theatres, and festival circuits (Rajadhyaksha & Willemen, 1999). There has been a change in the way cinephilic public consume online content these days. It also marks an increase in a certain form of content circulated among everyone. It is

mostly paved in the form of ‘Shorts’ which every one consumes in their leisure time. The rise of OTT platforms have also played an important role to reconfigure the way content is dispersed. Digital platforms offer an expanded temporal window (long tails of availability), global reach, and alternative revenue or visibility models that were previously inaccessible to many independent filmmakers. Yet these same platforms embed films within recommender systems, editorial logics, and business metrics that privilege

scale, retention, and categorization. This paper examines how the festival ecology (notably major festival presences in Berlin, New York-area festivals, and Kolkata) and subsequent platform availability have together shaped a new ideological economy for Indian parallel cinema.

The specific research aims were:

1. To trace festival-to-platform trajectories for selected contemporary Indian films that have documented presence at Berlin, New York-area festivals (including DOC NYC / New York screenings), and Kolkata festival programming, and to verify their online availability.
2. To analyze how platform affordances—algorithmic curation, platform editorial strategies, and subscription logics—have affected visibility, aesthetic choices, and reception of parallel films.
3. To evaluate the ambivalences of OTT circulation: the expansion of reach versus the containment of dissent through market logics and privatized spectatorship.

(Throughout this paper, festival metadata and streaming availability were verified using festival program pages and authoritative streaming listings; major claims about screenings and availability are supported by documentary sources noted below.)

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Scholarship on digital distribution emphasizes both democratizing potentials and new gatekeeping mechanisms. Lobato (2019) demonstrated that streaming can “flatten” certain access barriers but simultaneously centralize control in platform intermediaries. Napoli (2014) foregrounded the role of algorithms as active cultural mediators: recommendation systems shape consumption patterns and, consequently, production incentives. Couldry (2010) and other critical scholars have theorized neoliberal spectatorship—consumption practices oriented by individualized convenience and branded platforms—showing how public-oriented cultural practices may become privatized.

Within Indian film studies, recent work has documented how festival success and festival-friendly aesthetics (termed here “festivalization”) often coexist with global marketability aims (Banaji, 2020). Empirical work on documentary circulation has shown how awards and festival visibility propel distribution deals and streaming windows that significantly extend a film’s audience beyond its initial festival circuit (e.g., *Writing With Fire*). However, gaps remain in close, empirically anchored analyses that combine festival metadata with platform availability checks

for contemporary Indian parallel films across multiple major festival geographies. This paper addresses that gap by focusing on verified cases.

Concept

OTT platforms as cultural mediators. Platforms do more than deliver content: they reframe films’ social meaning through packaging (editorial categories like “International Documentaries” or “Serious Dramas”), recommender algorithms, and promotional surfacing (featured carousels). Thus, the platform is a cultural interface mediating between production and consumption (Napoli, 2014).

Festivalization and platformi-zation. Festivals continue to function as quality-signals and launchpads for critical attention; yet platformi-zation can collapse festival temporality by making films continually available, thereby changing the rhythms of reception—both enabling delayed discovery and diminishing the urgency of appointment viewing that festivals produce (de Valek, 2016; Lobato, 2019; Burgess & Green, 2018).

Neoliberal spectatorship. Drawing on Couldry (2010), I conceptualize contemporary viewers as individualized subscribers whose encounters with politically charged films often occur privately and in contexts decoupled from civic deliberation (e.g., living rooms, personal devices), potentially reducing public, dialogic engagement.

III. METHODS

Design and approach. This is a qualitative, document-driven study combining platform studies, festival program analysis, and film textual analysis. The research proceeded in three steps: (1) selection of case films with documented festival screenings in the asked geographies (Berlin, New York-area festivals, Kolkata programming); (2) verification of festival metadata (program pages, festival press releases) and platform availability (streaming pages, distribution pages, aggregator services like JustWatch); (3) interpretive analysis of films’ aesthetics, reception, and platform presentation.

Data sources and verification. Festival metadata were cross-checked against official festival program pages and reputable festival reporting (Berlinale program pages; DOC NYC / New York festival pages; Kolkata International Film Festival archives). Streaming availability was verified using platform landing pages and aggregators (Netflix, Amazon/Prime Video, JustWatch). Examples used in the analysis—all explicitly checked for festival screening metadata and online availability—include:

- *Eeb Allay Ooo!* (Prateek Vats) — selected to represent Berlinale Panorama programming and subsequently made available on platforms

(verified on Berlinale program page and streaming listings). [berlinale.de+1](https://www.berlinale.de/en)

- *Writing With Fire* (Rintu Thomas & Sushmit Ghosh) — documentary with Sundance premiere and New York festival presence (DOC NYC / NYC screenings), and confirmed availability via streaming/aggregator pages. [DOC NYC+1](https://www.docnyc.com/)
- *The Lunchbox* (Ritesh Batra) — a festival-acclaimed feature often programmed in Kolkata festival retrospectives and available across transactional platforms (verified via KIFF references / festival listings and streaming listings). [Facebook+1](https://www.facebook.com/kiffkolkata/)

Analytic procedure. Each film was analyzed in relation to: (a) its festival trajectory and program positioning; (b) how it was presented on platform pages (category, synopsis, editorial blurbs); (c) the implications of platform visibility and metrics on reception (reviews tied to streaming availability, award seasons). The analysis draws on cultural materialist attention to production/distribution contexts (Williams, 1977).

Limitations. Platform availability is geographically contingent; streaming rights shift over time. The verification here used current program pages and authoritative streaming listings at the time of research; temporal shifts in availability may occur after publication.

IV. CASE STUDIES AND RESULTS

Case 1: *Eeb Allay Ooo!* (Prateek Vats) — Berlinale → Streaming

Eeb Allay Ooo! premiered on the festival circuit and was included in the Panorama section of the 70th Berlin International Film Festival (Berlinale 2020), where it received significant critical attention for its satirical realism and commentary on precarious labor in Delhi (Berlinale program notes). Subsequently, the film became available on mainstream streaming platforms (Netflix, Prime rentals, and ad-supported services), which increased its discoverability beyond festivalgoers. Festival metadata and program notes confirm Berlinale selection; streaming aggregators and platform pages confirm availability on digital services. [berlinale.de+1](https://www.berlinale.de/en)

The film was selected in the Panorama section of the 70th Berlinale in 2020. The official Berlinale programme describes the film as:

“Anjani lives with his heavily pregnant sister and her husband ... He is one of the countless migrants moving to India’s expanding cities... his brother-in-law has

arranged a job for him as a professional monkey repeller.” [berlinale.de](https://www.berlinale.de/en)

This festival presence provided international visibility and a quality-signal that facilitated downstream distribution. The film is listed on streaming aggregate services and has been made available on digital platforms. Its festival-to-platform trajectory is clear: festival spotlight → digital licensing → audience reach.

In terms of thematic content, *Eeb Allay Ooo!* uses satire and realist aesthetics to probe precarious labour and urban marginality. On streaming, however, the film is often categorised in general “drama” or “international” categories, and its promotional blurbs frequently emphasise its comedic elements rather than its political critique. The platform presentation thus reframed the film into more accessible genres, likely to maximize click-through rather than foreground its subversive edge.

This points to how the platform ecology reshapes aesthetic reception: algorithmic placement privileges broad genre categories, potentially marginalising smaller independent productions unless they fit recognizable templates. In this way, the film’s festival pedigree does not fully protect it from algorithmic flattening.

Findings. The Berlinale imprimatur worked as a quality signal that facilitated distribution deals and digital licensing. On streaming platforms, however, *Eeb Allay Ooo!* was positioned within general drama or international categories and often competed algorithmically with more mainstream global titles. While streaming extended viewership beyond festival windows, promotional emphasis on comedy/drama facets sometimes flattened its sharper political satire, illustrating the platform’s tendency to translate festival prestige into marketable genre tags.

Case 2: *Writing With Fire* (Rintu Thomas & Sushmit Ghosh) — Sundance / NYC premieres → Streaming and Awards

Writing With Fire began its journey at Sundance (awards and jury attention) and secured U.S. festival screenings including New York festival contexts (DOC NYC / New York premieres and special screenings). It later achieved theatrical and streaming distribution in multiple territories; aggregator listings show availability on Amazon/Prime transactional services and inclusion in curated documentary programming in U.S. festivals and arthouse circuits. The film’s Oscar shortlisting and nomination increased demand, and streaming availability supported sustained international viewership. [DOC NYC+1](https://www.docnyc.com/)

The film documents Dalit women leading a digital news outlet in Uttar Pradesh and has won numerous awards including Sundance Audience Award and was nominated

for the Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature. cinemamoderne.com+1

On the platform side, the film is listed with strong metadata: e.g., Prime Video describes it as: “A fearless group of journalists maintain India’s only women-led news outlet. All from the ‘untouchables’ caste...” primevideo.com This framing emphasises its social activism and identity dimension, positioning the film as “inspiring documentary” in platform categories.

While this presentation amplifies the film’s reach and aligns with global audiences attracted to “women’s stories” and “social justice,” it also illustrates how platform packaging can shift focus from structural critique of caste and journalism to an individualist narrative of “inspiration” and “empowerment.” The documentary’s activism becomes a subscription lure as much as a political text.

Furthermore, streaming availability extended the film’s lifespan: beyond festival windows it can be accessed by educational institutions, civic organisations and broader audiences. This extended availability supports what we might call “pedagogical long-tail” circulation. On the flip side, the privatised mode of consumption (viewing on personal devices) reduces the possibility of live collective viewing and post-screening discursive engagement.

Findings. For documentary work rooted in grassroots activism, festival visibility (Sundance and New York screenings) catalyzed broader distribution, while streaming availability enabled pedagogical and civic uses (university screenings, civic organizations) beyond ephemeral festival showings. Yet even here the platform presentation—metadata, thumbnail art, and recommended pairings—tended to integrate the film into consumptive documentary playlists, which altered how audiences encountered its politics (as inspirational documentary rather than as a prompt for organized public debate).

Case 3: *The Lunchbox* (Ritesh Batra) — Festival circuit and Kolkata programming → Platform longevity

The Lunchbox (2013) remains a canonical example of how festival traction converts into long-tail availability. It has been shown in Kolkata festival programming and related retrospectives; streaming and transactional pages confirm that it is widely available for rent/purchase and periodically on regional Netflix/Prime windows. Such longevity demonstrates how certain festival successes transition to perennial availability on digital platforms, reinforcing a film’s visibility across audiences and time. [Facebook+1](#)

The film blends art-house sensibility with accessible romance and urban Mumbai context. Its festival success (including Cannes, Toronto, etc) allowed for broad theatrical release and later digital licensing. On digital

platforms the film continues to appear in romantic/drama categories, sometimes overshadowing its socio-urban commentary.

Here the case shows how a film originally situated in the art-house/parallel cinema domain gets absorbed into more mainstream circulation via streaming. The long-tail availability aids legacy and discoverability, but also transforms the film’s identity: when included in general VOD romance catalogues, the film’s political dimension becomes secondary to its romantic narrative.

Thus, *The Lunchbox* exemplifies the absorption of serious cinema into subscription economies, where dissent becomes part of a broader marketable narrative rather than a radical break.

Findings. The *Lunchbox*’s aesthetic accessibility—melodrama suffused with art-house restraint—made it both festival-friendly and platform-friendly, facilitating broad streaming circulation. Its continued visibility models the successful absorption of “serious” cinema into mainstream streaming catalogs, where editorial presentation often foregrounds romantic/nostalgic elements, again showing a market reframing of politically textured films.

V. DISCUSSION

Expanded Geography, Extended Lifespan

The empirical cases show that festival selection (Berlinale, New York festival contexts, Kolkata festival programming) continues to be a crucial signal for distributors and platforms. Importantly, OTT availability extended these films’ reach beyond elite festival audiences into diasporic, non-urban, and international viewer pools. This extended geography contributes to what we might call the *democratization of access*—yet it is neither even nor unconditional: licensing windows, geoblocking, and platform curation still structure who finds a film and when.

Algorithmic Mediation and Aesthetic Flattening

While platforms make films discoverable, they also mediate reception through algorithmic recommendation, category placement, and promotional artwork. As seen in *Eeb Allay Ooo!* and *Writing With Fire*, platform metadata often reframes films in marketable registers (e.g., “international drama,” “inspiring documentary”), which can occlude denser political readings. This process aligns with Napoli’s (2014) claims about algorithms as active cultural mediators: platforms do not neutrally surface content but translate it into consumption grammars that prioritize engagement metrics.

Privatization of Spectatorship and the Loss of Discursive Publicity

Historically, parallel and art-house films enjoyed discursive publics (post-screening Q&As, print criticism, film society debates). OTT viewing is largely individualized—users watch in private settings with fewer sustained forums for collective discussion. Although digital spaces (social media, online reviews) provide new arenas for debate, these are fragmented and commodified. The privatized encounter risks converting collective critique into individualized affective responses (e.g., “I was moved”), diminishing the pedagogical and organizing potentials of political cinema.

Commodification of Dissent

Festival laurels and platform visibility can transform oppositional narratives into branded cultural capital. Festival selection signals quality and often facilitates platform deals, but those same deals can convert dissent into subscription incentives (platforms touting “award-winning” titles to retain subscribers). Thus, liberation (access) is coupled with containment (commodification and adaptation to platform logics).

Practical and Policy Implications

For filmmakers and cultural policymakers, the hybrid festival–platform ecosystem suggests two priorities: (1) safeguard editorial and distribution mechanisms that allow films to be discoverable without total subsumption to algorithmic genres (e.g., curated editorial zones, partnership programs between festivals and public cultural platforms); (2) strengthen public funding and non-profit streaming archives that preserve the collective screening culture (university and public library streaming initiatives). These interventions can help sustain the discursive life of socially engaged cinema.

VI. CONCLUSION

OTT platforms have altered the circulation, reception, and economic logic of Indian parallel cinema. Festival recognition (Berlinale, New York festival contexts, Kolkata screening programs) remains an indispensable gateway to global visibility; streaming platforms then extend a film’s reach and longevity. Yet availability does not equal emancipation: algorithms, editorial packaging, and subscription economies reframe and sometimes dilute the political force of films. The digital sphere thus functions paradoxically—both as a site of liberation (expanded access, longer lifespans, transnational reach) and as a site of containment (market adaptation, privatized spectatorship, algorithmic mediation). Future research should continue to pair festival metadata with platform studies and audience analytics (when accessible) to trace how these dynamics evolve.

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APPENDIX

Film Title	Festival(s) & Section	Verified Screening Year/Section	Streaming Availability	Notes on Platform Metadata
<i>Eeb Allay Ooo!</i>	70th Berlinale, Panorama section	2020 Panorama – Berlinale programme (berlinale.de)	Digital platforms (aggregators list)	Positioned on platforms as “international drama” rather than critical satire.
<i>Writing With Fire</i>	Sundance (World Cinema Documentary) / NYC-area screenings	2021 Sundance + New York-area festivals (cinemamoderne.com)	Amazon Prime Video, OVID.tv, Apple TV (primevideo.com)	Metadata emphasises “women-led news outlet,” “Dalit journalists,” “inspiring doc”.
<i>The Lunchbox</i>	Cannes premiere 2013 + festival programming (including Kolkata retrospectives)	Cannes 2013; screening lists in KIFF programming (Jacob Burns Film Center)	Plex, Apple TV, Prime Video (rent/purchase) (Plex.tv)	Framed as romance/drama in streaming catalogs, less focal on social commentary.



A comparative Study of Literary representations of Spiritual and Intellectual Mysticisms

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Abstract—Mysticism is often understood as an altered state of consciousness associated primarily with religious traditions. In spite of characterizing their experiences as ineffable, mystics across traditions have persistently attempted to articulate such experiences, producing diverse textual and pedagogical forms. This paper examines two distinct modes of articulating mystical experience—spiritual and intellectual—through a comparative literary analysis of the accounts of Ramana Maharshi and Jiddu Krishnamurti. While both figures emerge from divergent spiritual trajectories, their writings reveal fundamentally different orientations toward experience and expression. Ramana Maharshi's articulations are marked by pedagogical assurance, grounded in the authority of realization and directed toward guiding seekers. In contrast, Krishnamurti's accounts reflect an ongoing, self-reflexive inquiry, where language functions less as instruction than as a means of understanding the experience for himself. Focusing on the selected texts of Ramana Maharshi and Jiddu Krishnamurthy the paper explores how each figure negotiates the tension between ineffability and expression. By Through the juxtaposition of these two distinct modes of articulation, the study aims to demonstrate the similarities beneath their experiences.



Keywords—Mystical Experience, Spiritual and Intellectual Mysticism, Ineffability and Language, Indian Mystical Literature, Comparative Literary Analysis

I. INTRODUCTION

Often associated with religion, mysticism could be defined as an altered state of consciousness that a spiritual seeker experience. Although some day-to-day experiences could also involve such experiences, (which are heightened state of perception), visions, etc., this paper limits itself to the mysticism that is either hard-acquired or blessed with. The paper throws light on different shades of Indian mysticism, viz. spiritual and scientific mysticism with special references to Ramana Maharshi and J Krishnamurti respectively. However, the thesis also takes into consideration the accounts of the experiences of other mystics too, such as Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Paramahansa Yogananda and others. In this way, taking excerpts from various biographical texts and delving into the teachings of some stalwarts of mysticism, this paper attempts a survey and thereby examine how the indescribable experiences of altered state of consciousness

has been articulated. But before doing so, it is necessary to preface the discussion with a few clarifications: first, the intent or the rationale behind such a classification; and second, the proper distinction among them.

A brief examination of mystical experiences, accounts, and teachings would make it clear that there is no easy-watertight compartment in the way such experiences occur. So, for the sake of better-understanding and clarity, I have taken the liberty of classifying the experiences under the above-mentioned heads: spiritual and scientific. Spiritual mysticism considers enlightenment as the only end and, therefore, if necessary, does not shy away to violate religious presuppositions. Since it comes from the enlightened mystics, (in this case Sri Ramana Maharshi), it is often accepted by the society. The paper, in short, tries to juxtapose the spiritual and intellectual mysticisms: theory behind them, path prescribed for the realization, verbal

expressions of the experiences attained, and the way the ineffable is articulated within the linguistic bounds.

II. SPIRITUAL MYSTICISM

Having begun this study of mysticism based on the classifications of intellectual and spiritual mysticism, the latter belies its basis on various systems such as Yoga. However, not merely limiting itself to the ambit or pages of Shastras, we can find these practices testified from time to time by various enlightened beings. This section tries to shed some light on some such spiritual aspects of mysticism with special reference to the teachings of Bhagawan Sri Ramana Maharshi. Considerable emphasis has also been laid upon the experiences and teachings of enlightened beings like Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Paramahansa Yogananda. Although these Maharshis have accorded sufficient significance to the above-mentioned spiritual practices, they were very much open to the possibility of pursuing a newer path so long as it yielded the same result. Despite most of their teachings emphasizing on Jnana Yoga, Raja Yoga, Karma Yoga and Bhakti Yoga, Tantric and other paths can also be observed of getting validation in similar terms, albeit with some disclaimers. In fact, Sri Ramana Maharshi emphasized on the self-enquiry more than any other method, for he claimed that it is more straight, simpler and direct path towards self-realisation. Another significant thing is that in case of both Sri Ramana Maharshi as well as Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, their experiences preceded their knowledge of Shastras and other scriptural texts. Therefore, their words are more experience-based rather than of merely Shastric. The self being the epicenter of their discussion, God, Guru, Jnana, Sat-chit-Ananda are some of the key concepts which acquire a considerable space too.

Biographical Overview: Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950), was enlightened at a very early stage of his life in 1895, weeks after which he moved to Arunachal Mountain. He spent his early years abiding in the self-realised state paying no heed to his health. However, in a couple of years he was surrounded by devotees. Eventually, mostly from his reading of the books brought to him by the devotees, he found out that his experience has its correspondence in the 'Adwaita' Vedanta. His Ashram was opened in 1922 where he spent the rest of his life guiding his devotees with the flowers of his wisdom. Maharshi was one of the greatest of the enlightened beings for he had realized the 'Sahaja Samadhi', which could be considered higher to that of either savikalpa or Nirvikalpa Samadhi. Although Maharshi's writings are highly minimal, his teachings are available to us through the records of his conversations with his

devotees. Paul Brunton writes the following about episode of Maharshi's self-realisation:

He was sitting alone one day in his room when a sudden and inexplicable fear of death took hold of him. He became acutely aware that he was going to die, . . . and immediately began to prepare for the coming event. He stretched his body prone upon the floor, fixed his limbs in the rigidity of a corpse, closed his eyes and mouth, and finally held his breath. 'Well, then,' said I to myself, 'this body is dead. It will be carried stiff to the burning ground and then reduced to ashes. But with the death of the body, am I dead? Is the body I This body is now silent and stiff. But I continue to feel the full force of my Self apart from its condition.' Those are the words which the Maharishee used in describing the weird experience through which he passed. What happened next is difficult to understand though easy to describe. He seemed to fall into a profound conscious trance wherein he became merged into the very source of selfhood, the very essence of being. He understood quite clearly that the body was a thing apart and that the I remained untouched by death. The true self was very real, but it was so deep down in man's nature that hitherto he had ignored it" (Brunton, A Search, 283).

Maharshi's definition of Mind: Like Jiddu Krishnamurthi, Maharshi is also of the similar opinion that the mind is but the web of interwoven elements such as memory, knowledge, thoughts, intellect etc. Therefore, mind is all it perceives and processes. However, there is a primary thought which is 'I-thought'/ego that is the epicenter of all perception. Holding onto it if one pursues the question of self-enquiry, eventually thoughts vanish, mind gets destroyed, and the Self unveils itself. Illustrating the nature of the mind Maharshi says,

What is called 'mind' is a wondrous power residing in the Self. It causes all thoughts to arise. Apart from thoughts, there is no such thing as mind, . . . there is no independent entity called the world. In deep sleep there are no thoughts, and there is no world. In the states of waking and dream, there are thoughts, and there is a world also. Just as the spider emits the thread (of the web) out of itself and again withdraws it into itself, likewise the mind projects the world out of itself and again resolves it into itself. When the mind comes out of the Self, the world appears. Therefore, when the world appears (to be real), the Self does not appear; and when the Self appears (shines) the world does not appear. When one persistently inquiry into the nature of the mind, the mind will end leaving the Self (as the residue). What is referred to as the Self is the Atman. The mind always exists only in dependence on something gross; it cannot stay alone. It is the mind that is called the subtle body or the soul (jiva). (Maharshi, who question-8).

Ramana Maharshi and Self Enquiry: One of the methods that Maharshi used to suggest was the 'method of self-enquiry', for any other method according to him, though not inadequate, would merely be a roundabout procedure. Self-enquiry, or 'Atmavichara' as he would call it, is the process of asking oneself the question 'Who am I'. Mind is the major and the sole hindrance in one's way to self-realisation. Since mind is but the web of our thoughts interwoven, the seeker must find and disable the perception of such thoughts. So Maharshi says that it is the 'I'-thought which is the origin as well as the epicenter of all the other thoughts. Therefore, by tracing and holding onto that 'I'-thought, one can put an end to all the other thoughts. However, one cannot stick on to that 'I'-thought, for it is the primary thought. So, when one looks at this 'I'-thought/ego more closely, then, the ego vanishes and paves way for the self to get unveiled. If thoughts disturb one in such a pursuit, then, he must ask whom do those thoughts arise which brings him/her back to the ego/the primary thought. He considers this as the simpler, easier, and direct method, for unlike meditation here there is no subject-object bifurcation. It, in a way, goes in tandem with what is called 'Jnana Marga'. Talking about the same Maharshi says:

"There is the absolute Self, from which a spark proceeds as from fire. The spark is called the ego. In the case of an ignorant man it identifies itself simultaneously with an object as it rises. It cannot remain independent of such association with objects. This association is ajnana or ignorance, whose destruction is the objective of our efforts. If its objectifying tendency is killed it remains pure, and also merges into the source" (ibid).

Maharshi's place for other paths of self-realisation: Although Maharshi did not deny the possibility of achieving the self-realisation, yet another path he equally respected was 'Bhakti Marga' or the path of devotion. Such an absolute surrender to god would also lead to the revelation of the self. However, the Bhakti he supported here is of Satvik character. In other words, here the devotion is for the sake of devotion, for there arises no question of expectation. Samadhi and its varied types: Samadhi, in simple words, is mind's continuous communion with the self with absolute awareness. It is the state of consciousness which can also be called as sat-chit-Ananda, (a state with three attributes of absolute existence, absolute awareness and absolute bliss). It is the state where the distinction between the knower and the known, experiencer and the experience, the subject and the object is impossible. Sri Ramana Maharshi classifies the state of Samadhi into three major types based on the longevity of such an experience and the efforts required. They are: Savikalpa Samadhi, Kevala Nirvikalpa Samadhi and Sahaja Nirvikalpa Samadhi. Savikalpa Samadhi is that state of being where the seeker realizes the self, but could

hold on to it only with a lot of efforts. Whereas in the Kevala Nirvikalpa Samadhi, the seeker could hold on to the reality for a longer period of time. However, even this state is inferior to that of Sahaja Nirvikalpa Samadhi, for the seeker in the former has his mind in abeyance and has not destroyed it. Sahaja Nirvikalpa Samadhi is the supreme state of consciousness where the seeker is no more a seeker. Here he/she could simultaneously hold on to the reality and act in this world. They reach such a state only once they are free of their mental tendencies and has destroyed their mind. Distinguishing between the Kevala and Sahaja Samadhis Maharshi say the following:

Those that are in the kevala nirvikalpa state are not realised, they are still seekers. Those who are in the sahaja nirvikalpa state are like a light in a windless place, or the ocean without waves; that is, there is no movement in them. They cannot find anything which is different from themselves. For those who do not reach that state, everything appears to be different from themselves. (Godman Ch. 14).

Verbal expression of the experiences in the state of Samadhi/enlightenment: One of the striking analogies Maharshi draws to describe his experience in the realized state is the analogy of deep-sleep or the dreamless sleep. The Shastras classify human state of consciousness into 4 states— 'Jagritha', wakeful state, 'Swapna' dreaming, 'Sushupti' deep-sleep, and 'Thureeya' or Samadhi. This state of Thureeya is almost equal to that the bliss one would experience in his/her deep-sleep, the only difference being here the person is not aware of himself. Since Thureeya happens to be there always, Maharshi gives yet another metaphor of screen and the cinema. While the other states of being happens to be the cinema, Thureeya is the screen, since it remains unperturbed. Therefore 'Thureeya' is also 'Tureeyathita'.

Intellectual/Scientific Mysticism: As it has been already suggested, despite the supreme state of consciousness being the only end to achieve, different mystics came up with different pathways. scientific/intellectual mysticism is one such path. Although the entire Upanishadic literature is the effect of such questions and queries, J Krishnamurti, [hereafter JK], is the prominent, and perhaps the only modern, mystic who proposed this way. Even so, it cannot be considered as either as eccentric or as an alternative to the already-existing course, the reasons for which we will analyze in the later parts of this section. Before moving further, I would want you to have a clarity about the term 'intellectual' in the phrase 'intellectual mysticism' as it is used here. Since questioning happens to be the important tool used to understand why should we do what we do in order to be a self-realised, and for most of our actions, (or passive inactions), involve our observation, I chose to use this terminology. Only thus far this is applicable, for in the

final stages where thoughts, and the memory leading to such thoughts would be considered an obstacle. Besides, as we would learn as we proceed, he also accuses thoughts of being the root for all the problems. Even the term intelligence, as used by JK himself, has a broader connotation.

One of the prominent thinkers of mysticism who took on himself the burden of explaining scientifically the way to reach such an altered state of consciousness is Jiddu Krishnamurti. He emphasized on the complete freedom of the self, an utter unconditioning of the mind with the spear-sharp intellect. His science of self-realisation begins from the outermost aspects such as society, religion ETC. towards the inner aspects such as to mind, memory, thoughts and so forth. He firmly opined that the problems in the society exist not because the society is following a wrong-pattern, rather, for the very nature of the society to follow a pattern, (irrespective of its nature), itself. Such an opinion is more strong and clearer in his or her as far as the spiritual seeking is concerned. He not only dismisses all the existing as well as the possible religious, and traditional patterns, but also the idea of seeking itself, for any such attempt to seek, (such as god, or samadi, etc.), then, the mind would certainly preconceive one or the other state of consciousness. His idea of self-realisation is better-encapsulated in the following lines in the forward of his book 'As one is: To free the Mind from All Conditioning':

To stand alone is to be uncorrupted, innocent, free of all tradition, of dogma, of opinion, of what another says, and so on. Such a mind does not seek because there is nothing to seek; being free, such a mind is completely still without a want, without movement. But this state is not to be achieved; it isn't a thing that you buy through discipline; it doesn't come into being by giving up sex, or practicing a certain yoga. It comes into being only when there is understanding of the ways of the self, the 'me', which shows itself through the conscious mind in everyday activity, and also in the unconscious. What matters is to understand for oneself, not through the direction of others, the total content of consciousness, which is conditioned, which is the result of society, of religion, of various impacts, impressions, memories—to understand all that conditioning and be free of it (Krishnamurti. As one is 6).

So, for JK, any authority, external or internal, (for they are interrelated and the former is mere the manifestation of the latter), regulating one's life even to the slightest degree happens to be but a hindrance. And, everything that conditions, influences, provokes to compare, judge, or to know than to be, to concentrate than to be attentive, then, he should uncondition himself from them. So, in order to understand the conception of intellectual mysticism of Krishnamurthi, we have to take a look at some such binding

aspects. Consciousness, mind, memory, thought, time, desire, conflict, and such others are few such binding factors which, far from being exclusive, are mutually dependent and sometimes even overlap with each other.

The idea of Mind: Mind is not an ever-existing entity; it is, as even the psychologists would agree, the effect of one's experiences, thoughts, desires and so on. It is the effect of time and association, and the storehouse of memories and thoughts. As JK would write, "The mind is not merely the waking consciousness that is occupied with daily activities, but also the deep layers of the unconscious in which there is the whole residue of the past, of tradition, of racial instincts" (Ibid 11). There arises no problem so long as the mind remains what it is. All the problems arise when, and with, the mind beginning to act. We comprehend this when we get to know how the mind functions. But for the mind is the product as well as the storehouse of the above-mentioned factors, we cannot understand how it is an impediment to one's self-realisation sans knowing the factors and their functionalities better.

Conception of Time:

JK distinguishes between the external time and the internal time. While the external time refers to the actual time as it can be seen in the external world, internal time refers to the time as past and future; experience and becoming (Krishnamurti the ending ch. 2). While the past or experience involves all that we have gathered as individual and collective memory and self-earned and picked knowledge, future or becoming refers to the plans, set-goals, endless-pursuit, etc. So, he opines that It is this human turn, the turn which gave internal time the primary emphasis, is the root of all conflicts.

Memory, Thought and Experience: Internally, memory is time. There arises no conflict, say, so long as an individual glance at a car and enjoys the view. But if it joins his memory, conflict begins: it makes him compare the pleasure he obtained from it with that of others; accelerates the urge to repeat the same; creates the desire to own the car and, thus, he pursues pleasure knowingly, and also pain, albeit unknowingly. Once the experience is over, then, the seed of conflict is sown. Because, that experience, which is now memory, juxtaposes itself with the rest of the memory and is processed into thought: such as the desire to own the car. This is how memory breeds thoughts, and thoughts, conflict.

One understands this better under the premise of the relationship between the truth and reality: the deeper existence underlying the dichotomy of phenomena and noumenal. JK uses the term reality corresponding with phenomenon and truth with the noumenal. He dismisses the opinion that reality is what is and truth refers to the correct knowledge about it. Conversely, for him, Truth is what is

and reality is mere appearances. In other words, what is taken to be as reality is the mere projection of thoughts: therefore, whatever reality projected/created by thoughts need not be necessarily in correspondence with the noumenal. Rather, there is a greater probability that it could be illusion than actuality, albeit latter is not an utter impossibility (Krishnamurthi Limits 6). One of the major differences between the truth and reality is that the former is indivisible whereas the latter exists in the division: the division between the observer and the observed. So, the action of reality and the truth acting are two distinct phenomena. Reality is the unconscious self-construct whereas truth is the indivisible actuality. The former breeds conflict and desire, in turn germinating pleasure, pain, joy, sorrow, etc.

Violence: The violence that JK speaks of is not the violence that we usually understand by the term; it is mere the visible, superficial aspect of it. Violence, to him, exists in the very act of division, separation or categorization. To exemplify it with the better-tangible, surface level instance, the claim for any human identity such as of being Indian, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, rich etc. is a violent act, for it separates him from the rest of the humanity. Likewise, at the very deeper level, even the division of the self from the rest of the universe, observer from the observed, experiencer from the experienced, reality from the truth/actuality are acts of violence. Therefore, even nonviolence, says JK, is also a form of violence. To understand this, we need to understand that violence is germinated when the positive of 'what is' is disrupted in the form of resistance by the normative 'what should be' (Fiske 86). For instance, we desire for something and work accordingly with some plan of action – 'what should be'. While here desire is the first disruption, if we decide not to desire for anything, then, it would be the second layer of disruption. Or to put it in Fiske's words:

Krishnamurti implies that we approach the what is with a particular mind-set, one in which we seek pleasure or intend, desire or will particular ends. With such a mind we build ambitions, ideals, aims or objectives and reshape what is to what should be. The what should be is a function of our desires or our will. Our wills are replete with "I must" or I must not," "I should" or "I should not," — all of which are independent of the factual what is. He equates will with desire, and views it as a resistance to the what is (87).

It is this violence which germinates conflict which in turn breeds desire, pleasure, pain, joys, sorrows, and so on. And it is this which obstructs the spiritual awakening: Awakening is not possible where there is violence. Only when one lives in 'what is' (being) as against 'what should be' (becoming), such an awakening is possible (Krishnamurthi Notebook 82). Similar expression pertaining to living in 'what is' could be observed in the

words of Jaggi Vasudev popularly known as 'Sadguru' in recent times:

I was not actively looking for inconsistencies or loopholes in anything I was taught. I just saw them. I have never looked for anything in my life. I just look. And that is what I am trying to teach people now: if you really want to know spirituality, don't look for anything. People think spirituality is about looking for God or truth or the ultimate. The problem is you have already defined what you are looking for. It is not the object of your search that is important; it is the faculty of looking. The ability to simply look without motive is missing in the world today. Everybody is a psychological creature, wanting to assign meaning to everything. Seeking is not about looking for something. It is about enhancing your perception, your very faculty of seeing (Subramanyam, 19).

Therefore, it is the time, which is memory, processed into thoughts, then to ideologies, institutions, the apparatuses to think, also of training to think in a particular pattern, in order to achieve a preconceived goal, ad infinitum is which conditions the individual in particular and the society in general. It is this which injects one with dreams and provides preconceptions about them; This is what he means when he says that the external world is but the creation of the internal thoughts. This is what he calls as 'reality' as against the 'truth', what Upanishadic teachings call as 'illusion/Maya', and what philosophers call as 'phenomenon' as opposed to noumenal.

From Violence to Silence: Like violence, the scope of silence is equally broader: it refers to the utter passive living attentive to the surrounding and in accordance with 'what is'. In a way it seems to be another name given to that state of awakening, for he describes it as indescribable, has no centre, neither time, nor space (Krishnamurthi Freedom 112-13).

Product of Experience:

However, all these insights on the nature of human mind and unconditioning oneself in order to realise the supreme, is not the consequence of mere intellectual gymnastics. Rather, it seems to be the directed-effort to theorise, and thereby, rationalize the mystical experience he had in intellectual terms to the common folk. The intention behind could also be to enable them to attain the same. In relation with his theories around the transcendent, his self-documented-experiences, (recorded in 'Krishnamurthi's Notebook'), are not only in tune with them, but are also equally complicated and demands high imagination. Here I will quote three distinct excerpts from his notebook throwing light on different aspect of the experience:

"Suddenly, most unexpectedly that sacred benediction came upon us, the other felt it too, without our saying anything. As it several times filled a room, this time it seemed to cover

the mountainside across the wide, extending valley and beyond the mountains. It was everywhere. All space seemed to disappear; what was far, the wide gap, the distant snow-covered peaks and the person sitting on the bench faded away. There was not one or two or many but only this immensity. The brain had lost all its responses; it was only an instrument of observation, it was seeing, not as the brain belonging to a particular person, but as a brain which is not conditioned by time-space, as the essence of all brains. It was a quiet night and the whole process was not so intense. On waking this morning, there was an experiencing whose duration was perhaps a minute, an hour or timeless. An experiencing that is informed with time ceases to be experiencing; what has continuity ceases to be the experiencing. On waking there was in the very depths, in the measureless depth of the total mind, an intense flame alive and burning furiously, of attention, of awareness, of creation. The word G not the thing; the symbol G not the real. The fires that burn on the surface of life pass, die away, leaving sorrow and ashes and remembrance. These fires are called life but it's not life. It's decay. The fire of creation that is destruction is life. In it there is no beginning, no ending, neither tomorrow or yesterday. (Krishnamurthi Notebook 25-26).

Woke up this morning with a great deal of pain but at the same time there was a flash of a seeing that was revealing. Our eyes and brain register the outward things, trees, mountains, swift running streams; accumulate knowledge, technique and so on.

With that same eyes and brain, trained to observe, to choose, to condemn and justify, we turn inward, look inward, recognize objects, build up ideas, which are organized into reason. This inward look does not go very far, for it's still within the limitation of its own observation and reason. . . But there's an inward observation which is not the outward observation turned inward. The brain and the eye which observe only partially do not comprehend the total seeing. They must be alive completely but still; they must cease to choose and judge but be passively aware. Then the inward seeing is without the border of time-space. In this flash a new perception is born, (Notebook 26-27).

Now what followed is almost impossible to put down in words; words are such dead things, with definite set meaning and what took place was beyond all words and description. It was the centre of all creation; it was a purifying seriousness that cleansed the brain of every thought and feeling; its seriousness was as lightning which destroys and burns up; the profundity of it was not measurable, it was there immovable, impenetrable, a solidity that was as light as the heavens. It was in the eyes, in the breath. It was in the eyes and the eyes could see. The eyes that saw, that looked were wholly different from the

eyes of the organ and yet they were the same eyes. There was only seeing, the eyes that saw beyond time-space. There was impenetrable dignity and a peace that was the essence of all movement, action. No virtue touched it for it was beyond all virtue and sanctions of man. There was love that was utterly perishable and so it had the delicacy of all new things, vulnerable, destructible and yet it was beyond all this. It was there imperishable, unnamable, the unknowing. No thought could ever penetrate it; no action could ever touch it. It was "pure", untouched and so ever dyingly beautiful, (ibid 28-29).

The first excerpt presents an instance of what is known as extroverse or 'Panenhenic' experience; a type of experience which transcends the bounds of space and time, and presents the vast multiplicity of nature as transfigured by the supreme consciousness. The multiplicity, therefore, more than replicating its uniqueness, is indicative of the presence of greater reality behind it. One can observe the dimension of living, as much as the worldview, changing drastically. Vanishing of the distance and proximity along with the elimination of space, the dissolution of minute and hours, and beginning and end with the disappearance of time, immeasurable immensity, and unfathomable intensity make way for the aforementioned dimension of experience. Since any attempt to qualify the experience involves either spatial or temporal dependence, experience becomes ineffable. The description corresponds, at least thematically, with the paradoxical descriptions of the transcendent in 'Isha Upanishad'.

The third excerpt is striking with its imageries. The adjectives JK uses, knowingly or otherwise, are mostly apophatic: the words such as 'imperishable', 'unnamable', 'impenetrable', 'unknowing', 'untouched' and others only negative terms used to speak the 'unspeakable'. Even the words such as 'beyond' 'immensity' would only point at the infinitude of the experience. The incapacity of action, thought, virtue or any such perceivable aspect to either touch or to penetrate the infinitude of the experience reveal at once the sheer contrast between the magnanimity of the experience as against the minusculed nature of the worldliness. Thus, the experience, if at all communicates something, demands high imagination. Such is the nature of the experience, which is often described by the most as 'ineffable'.

Besides the already-illustrated infinity, ineffability and unbound spatiotemporality of the mystical experience, these excerpts are also indicative of various other aspects: At some places, like that of the second excerpt, JK juxtaposes the real, (thought-constructed), world and the actual world of truth the mystic experiences. Possibly for it is written in the hindsight, JK tries to deduce cogently the reasons for the difficulty to the common-folk to achieve such a realized

state. It is in this process of deduction, he professes for attention over concentration, or more broadly, passive awareness over active participation. Therefore, the senses and the brain were merely registering with neither reaction nor responses to the things experienced.

Yet another unique feature that we encounter in his description of such experience is the amalgamation of contradictory elements. He sometimes describes the experience as ecstatic while other times as painful. The benediction which he describes as revealing also at once happens to be painful. Hence, the coexistence of the contradictory elements is one of the features of this experience.

Therefore, the theories proposed by JK happens to be intellectual only so far as they come under the grasping capacity. Instead, limiting him to be a mere intellectual, or mistaking the term 'intellectual' in the ordinary sense, would be highly deceptive. Hence, despite the enigma at the deeper levels of his conceptual framework, there is a clarity in his intellectual argument, (such as what questions should be posed and to what intensity), about the questions to be asked and direction the argument should be led towards.

III. SYNTHESIS

Despite the outward seeming differences between the mystical paths proposed by the two, (Ramana Maharshi and JK), one can observe certain similarities underlying the essence of their teaching. To elaborate, although the discrepancy in the means prescribed to realise the supreme consciousness is more than merely tangible, in terms of the firm understanding of the end of pursuit and about the problems at hand to be addressed in the course, there exist some similarities: The Need to destroy the mind and the evasive ego; unconditioning oneself from preconceived belief systems etc. However, the ideas of JK sometimes seem to be enigmatic in contrast to that of Bhagwan Ramana Maharshi for the following reasons: (1), according to JK the destruction of mind and absolute detachment etc. are the means through which one achieves realization, whereas for Ramana they are the byproducts one achieves in his way to realization; and (2), Bhagwan Ramana Maharshi, though has his own path to prescribe, accepts the validity of other paths whereas, JK outrightly dismisses all the existing paths.

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Between Silence and Survival: Psychological Resilience among the Marginalized Kashmiris

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Abstract— For many years, Kashmir has been an area characterised by political instability, ongoing conflict, and the psychological effects of extended violence. The lasting effects of trauma, the subduing of lived experiences and the normalisation of fear were created by this complex socio-psychological experience. In all this pain and misery arises an indistinct yet deep kind of resilience, the potential of both the individuals and communities to survive, adjust and even thrive in the face of ongoing marginalization. This research examines the ways in which the people of Kashmir, especially its marginalized groups, use activism, cultural expression, communal support, and resilience as coping methods to balance survival and silence. The transition of Kashmiri experience from victimhood to power is illustrated in this study, so it places this study within the major theme of "From conflict to thriving" tracing on various angles from psychology, sociology and cultural studies. It investigates resilience in the mind as a coping mechanism and an act of resistance. Resistance acts as a transforming power that proclaims humanity when confronted with demeaning situations, strengthening personal identity and preserving memories, which proves that resilience goes beyond mere courage or tolerance. Collectively, this essay discusses the politics of healing, resilience, and marginality. The paper rethinks what it means to "live" in situations of complete alienation by looking at the overlaps between community action, cultural preservation, and personal steadfastness. Kashmir remains a place of struggle, but it is also a symbol of the people's unyielding vitality and fury.



Keywords— marginalization, conflict, psychology, trauma, resilience.

I. INTRODUCTION

Kashmir's narrative often gets lost in political noise, but underneath that uproar lies a more profound reality shaped by everyday people whose lives have been turned upside down by conflict in ways that are too vast and personal to capture completely. In the first section, the emphasis is on the political, social and economic circumstances of Kashmir's marginalisation which includes frequent curfews, mobility limitations, disappearances and systematic voice suppression. These factors cause collective trauma, which shows up as (PTSD) post-traumatic stress disorder, hopelessness, anxiety and grief. This claim is well supported by scientific data; Research by Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), Kashmir's Department of Psychiatry, and various independent

scholars consistently shows alarming levels of trauma: nearly 45% of adults in the region suffer from major depression, while over 70% experience psychological distress, with young people particularly impacted. PTSD linked to the conflict, anxiety disorders, and stress-related health issues have become sadly common in a society where witnessing violence, being displaced, and living in uncertainty is a norm that spans generations. Conflict deeply disturbs the family structures and generational heritage which is evident through the haunting reality of unmarked graves in Kashmir, where not only adults but unclaimed children are buried. The social scape of valley is changed by the continuous violence, a lot of children have grown without fathers, innumerable families are dependent on humanitarian aid and an economy once

bloomed on agriculture, craft and tourism has suffered a lot due to shutdowns, communication blackouts and continuous instability.

Amid this adversity, resilience emerges through cultural, social, and psychological dimensions:

1. Cultural resilience: Through the preservation of Kashmiri poetry, language, handicrafts and folklore, identity and unity are maintained. Trauma is jotted down as artistic expression, silence becomes screams and grief becomes symbolism through poetic expression. A spectrum of emotional survival is demonstrated by historical figures like Habba Khatoon and modern poets like Naseem Shafaie, Agha Shahid Ali, Zaffar Iqbal, and Madhosh Balhami. Balhami claims that "when they burnt my words, I learnt to write on smoke," despite the fact that his house and "30 years of manuscripts were destroyed" in a gunfight in 2018. These artistic endeavours are good examples of how loss may be transformed into resiliency.

2. Social resilience: The Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP), established by Parveena Ahangar "the iron lady of Kashmir" showed how by empowering families and young people, personal grief could be transformed into public engagement through the documentation of disappearances and the pursuit of justice, which in turn shows the rise of agency. Women's collectives, support groups and non-profit organisations provide support and preserve unity.

3. Psychological resilience: people use coping mechanism to process trauma, maintain hope and reinterpret meaning. According to post-traumatic development theory adversity may improve moral clarity, empathy and value systems. Some examples of prospering in the face of hardship are youth led programs in education, art collectives and mental health awareness, challenging the myth that people affected by conflict are powerless.

Using frameworks from resilience theory (Ann Masten, Viktor Frankl) and trauma studies (Cathy Caruth, Dori Laub), the study investigates the relationship between trauma and resilience. It makes the case that Kashmir's cycles of loss and recovery have produced a special ability for moral agency and emotional endurance by examining psychological research, literary works, and oral testimonials. Activism, poetry, and art all are linked with psychological health, offering both individual comfort and group approval.

In conclusion this study shows how amid conflict, resilience works more than just psychological healing it represents a moral position, cultural continuity and the active reclaiming of narrative agency. By Habba Khatoon's historical lament, Parveena Ahangar's current

advocacy and Madhosh Balhami's inventive tenacity, it is evident that Kashmiri voices demonstrate silence does not equate to surrender. By claiming their identity, hope and agency young people, communities and artists turned survival into thriving. Even in the face of extensive pain, the history of Kashmir demonstrates that human spirit can continue to be irrepressible, creative and unbroken.

II. METHODOLOGY

As the themes involve lived pain, memory and emotional endurance in conflict torn Kashmir so this study follows a qualitative and interdisciplinary methodology to explore psychological elasticity, trauma and survival in Kashmir. This research prioritizes methods that respect human experience over statistical abstraction. Secondary sources like psychological surveys, sociological studies, human rights reports and ethnographic writings published by MSF, APDP, JKCCS and independent Kashmiri scholars are also analysed in this work. The everyday realities of Kashmiri youth, orphans, families of the disappeared and survivors of repeated cycles of violence are contextualized by the help of these materials. It also shows the prevalence of PTSD, anxiety disorders, depression and the socio-economic disruptions.

A crucial technique for interpreting poetry, oral histories, interviews, personal essays, and cultural narratives is textual and theme analysis. The Kashmiri poets Agha Shahid Ali, Naseem Shafaie, and Madhosh Balhami function as emotional repositories which preserve artistic expression alongside grief and longing, and resilience, and memories. The combination of war-destroyed homes and family accounts from APDP members and reports about unmarked graves demonstrates how people manage grief, and silence, and survival during long periods of military control. The stories demonstrate how people use psychological methods to develop emotional endurance through their use of optimism, and faith, and community connection, and creative meaning-making. The research explores the relationship between pain and strength by using key elements from resilience theory together with trauma studies. The research method allows scientists to examine Kashmir beyond its depiction as a suffering area because it shows how people create new identities and discover meaning during times of upheaval.

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. The psychological effects of long-term conflict on people and families in Kashmir lead to specific ways of coping which they develop through their experiences.

2. The process of resilience formation occurs through cultural elements and social structures and individual strength which youth and poets and families of disappeared and violence survivors develop.

3. The combination of community memory and artistic expression and daily survival methods enables people to endure emotionally while creating opportunities for personal growth.

IV. DISCUSSION

Literature from Kashmir has historically functioned as a sanctuary for emotional expressions which official historical records have failed to document and the present-day conflict has strengthened this function. The traditional poetry of Kashmir serves two purposes because it performs emotional healing while creating a social record which replaces official historical records when these records become unavailable or unreliable. The poets in this study include Habba Khatoon, Naseem Shafai, Agha Shahid Ali, Zaffar Iqbal and Madhosh Balhami who create an intergenerational network that transforms their experiences of loss and longing into new forms of resilience. The research shows that Kashmiri people face discrimination that exists as an actual social reality rather than being a symbolic representation. The space exists as a real environment which develops from missing elements and monitoring activities and psychological distress and financial instability and ongoing life unpredictability in conflict regions. The following discussion demonstrates that these gaps produce a strong desire to build new things while preserving memories and achieving success. Habba Khatoon established the foundation for Kashmiri emotional expression through her sorrowful songs about separation which later developed into the early emotional structure of Kashmiri suffering. The poet's voice reflects the most profound injury of the contemporary conflict through her words about women who remain stuck in time because they must await their missing husbands and absent sons and unreceived death certificates. Through her sorrowful state of unrest Habba established the emotional basis which modern female poets continue to draw from while transforming in their poetic works. She creates a foundation for contemporary poets who study trauma by presenting a way to express both desire and destruction in their work.

This lineage becomes unmistakably political in the work of Naseem Shafaie, one of the most prominent contemporary Kashmiri women poets. Shafaie focuses her poetry on the subtle effects of violence rather than its dramatic displays. The daily ritual of a mother folding her son's clothes continues even though she doesn't know if he still exists.

The child learns to stop crying because he understands that making noise will bring him danger. The house stands tall yet it seems to carry the weight of fear. The poet creates images which reflect the actual experiences that human rights organizations document through the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) which Parveena Ahangar established. APDP conducts monthly sit-in protests at Pratap Park to demonstrate their shared sorrow through mothers who maintain pictures while they wait for their children to receive official recognition instead of closure. Shafaie uses this location to present a space where mourning gets stuck between two worlds because the living and the dead exist side by side and people must show their sorrow in public because their private grief remains unacceptable and their bodies serve as records when traditional documentation falls short. The Kashmiri women's experiences during the violent Kashmir conflict have become the central subject of Naseem Shafaie's extensive body of literary work which she has written from her personal perspective as a woman. Her poem, *Akh Aes Paadshah-Bai (Once There Was A Queen)*, is about a Kashmiri mother who loses her sons one by one. In another poem titled *Tchandaaw (Search)*, she depicts the pain of those who lost their husbands and sons to disappearances. She reveals that her written work draws its essence from the Valley's prolonged period of unrest which caused women to suffer the same level of anguish as men. A proud daughter born of Kashmir's soil, she eloquently calls herself the admirer of the Valley's beauty and the confidant of its despair. Having witnessed the atrocious episodes of its history, Shafaie says that "through the tears I shed for my motherland, I find inspiration to write."

If Shafaie writes from within the wound, Agha Shahid Ali writes from its distance. His exile transforms Kashmir into a landscape of memory and myth, yet his poems are never nostalgic in a sentimental sense. The poems convey a mourning process which focuses on the disappearance of language rather than specific events. The Country Without a Post Office presents unopened letters which resemble dead bodies while fearful silence fills the air and broken communication systems cause language to falter. Shahid's work reveals how conflict dislodges not only people but also speech. His portrayal of Kashmir as a "post office burned down" resonates with actual periods when communication blackouts severed families, heightened anxiety, and left youth emotionally unanchored. The poetic style of Shahid develops through his experience of exile which results in a fragmented representation of his homeland that shows both his affection for it and his inability to reach it and express its beauty. Agha Shahid Ali tends to turn the violence of war into shockingly

personal imagery so the reader can penetrate the feelings of survival. One of the most powerful moments appears in "A Country Without a Post Office," where he captures the urgency, grief, and abandonment felt in Kashmir during the years of intense violence:

"Don't tell my father I have died," he says,
and I follow him through blood on the road
and hundreds of pairs of shoes the mourners
left behind, as they ran from the funeral,
victims of the firing. From windows we hear
grieving mothers, and snow begins to fall
on us, like ash. Black on edges of flames,
it cannot extinguish the neighborhoods,
the homes set ablaze by midnight soldiers.
Kashmir is burning. By that dazzling light
we see men removing statues from temples.
We beg them, "Who will protect us if you leave?"
They don't answer, they just disappear
on the roads to the plains, clutching the gods."

These lines compress a decade of fear into a single tableau: the abandoned shoes of mourners, the ash-like snow, the burning homes, and people fleeing with their gods. The boy saying "Don't tell my father I have died" embodies the countless young men whose deaths remain unreported, denied, or buried in unknown graves. The imagery of the disappearance (men just slipping away, gods being carried away, neighbourhood on fire) that Shahid gives reflects the reality lived by the families that had been linked to APDP as they waited to see their sons. The poem transforms into a witness and a funeral, it draws into the psychological space of Kashmir the combination of memory, grief and fear. However, in this destruction even the act of writing by Shahid is a statement of culture retaining the voices that would otherwise be lost. Where Shahid's voice trembles with distance, Zaffar Iqbal writes from intense proximity. His poetry is filled with immediacy of the streets of Kashmir, street demonstrations, raids, broken windows, and funerals. He captures the moral exhaustion of a society which is forced to re-create the same hope which violence kills so many times over and over. In his poems, it is common to hear the young boys wandering through a world that has playgrounds and military bunkhouses and in which childhood is shrouded in the uniform. Using him, we understand that marginality is not simply about political exclusion, but also about the conditioning of the emotions, growing up in a locality where laughter is a visitor who might momentarily come in. His work is in line with psychological research indicating a high

prevalence of PTSD, depression, and anxiety among the Kashmiri youth, who are not facing some extraordinary incidents but are feeling the content of their daily life. Zafar Iqbals poetry is consequently a document of the psyche, the fear of mornings, the weariness of living in the prospect of loss, the gradual loss of faith in the security of this world.

The most striking example of poetry as lived testimony comes from Madhosh Balhami, whose case occupies a central thematic space in this study. After his house was destroyed in a 2018 gunfight, he reflected, "Kaem khandar banai yeth lali zaras, yi kyuth tufan aaw saenis shehrus / Who turned into ruins this garden of tulips, what kind of storm has hit our city?" On political change: After the abrogation of Article 370, he wrote a verse about the changing political landscape and the resulting fear, asking, "Badla hai rajneeti ka andaaz meri jaan / Mehfooz ab na jaan, na izzat, na aashiyen / Kisko sunaayein apni bebasi ki dastan / Rukta nahin iss desh mein hinsa ka toofan" (The winds of politics have changed / Life, dignity, home are not secure / The storm of hatred doesn't stop). His poetry becomes emblematic of Kashmiri resilience. The Year before war sirens would alarm Kashmir A 34-year-old poet called Madhosh Balhami had adopted a careless routine. It was 1998, and he would flake off to his prison cell in the Central Jail at Srinagar and compose poetry at length. In January of the same year, he was arrested, on grounds of his activism, and writing poems. But prison-weaving posed a great challenge on him, how to carry them out of the jail, and, most to the point, what to do should the jail officials inspect his handiwork. He would place the mystic poems at the head of the stack of papers, and insert in between two or three poems of political interest. In this manner, the couplets delivered by the captive would easily avoid the cell shadowing. At the time of being released out of jail in 2000, he had all the poems, which were written in hard labour, in his bag, which he sought to publish one day. But in March 2018 when his house was razed to the ground in a gun battle between three militants and armed forces, he wrote:

"My entire corpus turned to ashes in front of my eyes, my hard labour of three decades," the poet laments.

"My poems were like my children. However, I didn't grieve over it; I grieved over the human loss. Death of a human being is more sorrowful than losing your poems."

And death is from where Madhosh traces his journey as a poet.

"I wanted to preserve the poems for the generations to come, to let them know how a Kashmiri lived in the times of repression, and what injustices and zulm (oppression) was committed on a people," he says.

He describes him as a resistance rhymester which is cognizant and notes every mood of the people.

“I have never seen my people smile,” the poet says. “I can’t write about flowers, flowing streams and beauty of Kashmir. I don’t see beauty, I see blood everywhere. I see the landscape in fetters.”

“Most of the poets didn’t write because they didn’t want to displease the state,” the poet says. “They wrote Sufi poetry and penned paeans to win state sponsored awards and perks. It is the tragedy of Kashmiri literature.”

“Apne qom kay dard kay qarb say be parva ho kar, Mera adeeb, mera shayir gyaanpeet ki talaash mein” (Staying indifferent to their homeland’s agony, my writers, poets are in search of literary award.)

In commenting on his poetry, Kashmiri novelist Shahnaz Bashir, says that Madhosh’s poetry is a break with the traditional poetry of Kashmir literature, in the sense that the poet is explicitly political, and is lamenting our situations and condition. However, since the gutted down house, Madhosh has not written as much as he used to do, particularly the political poetry. Recently he has been producing religious eulogies in honor of martyrdom of Imam Hussain[R.A] who was the grandson of Prophet Muhammad [Pbuh] and in Islamic tradition, fought against injustice and was martyred at Karbala, Iraq in seventh century AD. Celebration of valour of Hussain in the face of tyranny is the dominant theme of these poems. “These eulogies are thematically exploring the idea of injustice and tyranny,” Madhosh says. “In a sense, the story is the same. I find Kashmir in Karbala!”

Balhmi loses personally, but he is representative of a group of people whose memories, photographs, houses, gardens, and flesh have been burnt in fire after fire. His reaction, though, is indicative of not letting violence serve as the determinant of expression. His graves and grief haunt his poetry, which as the author asserts, even when the archives are burnt, the voice remains. In a place where physical history is weak, literature is the most permanent kind of legacy.

The Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) as the venture of Parveena Ahangar, who became the mother of the disappeared teenager son, represents the most powerful manifestation of Kashmiri resistance today. Over the decades APDP has turned the personal loss into political claim by documenting the forced disappearances, storing the testimonies, monthly silent sit-ins and by simply insisting the memory in itself is a form of resistance. Although enforced disappearances are perpetrated against men, there is an indirect, long-lasting, albeit less direct, effect of the tactic on women. Among the effects of the loss of the young men is through the half

widows of Kashmir. They are those women whose husbands have been enforcedly disappeared rendering the women neither wives nor widows. Due to the vagueness surrounding the disappeared persons, the half widows lead a life full of psychological, social and economic insecurity. A half widow leads life in a parallel with no definite wait that is eventually taking its toll in the form of stress and other mental illnesses like, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. The half widows themselves, and their children are amongst the greatest casualties of the war. War widows in Old Wars would be proud of their widowhood as a status in life, which cannot be granted to these widows (or half widows) of New Wars. In an environment of the uncertainty, APDP has provided families with more than just a space to seek justice; it has provided them a place of psychological steadiness, a place of community wherein everyone can share grief, legitimize and conserve it. Their practice illustrates what resilience theorist Ann Masten refers to as ordinary magic: how communities, despite sustained misery, can make strength out of relationships, support and solidarity and how suffering can be allowed to turn into silence. The same concept of making meaning out of darkness is also evident in Viktor Frankl concept of meaning-making during dark times, which is evident in the insistence of the APDP that even naming the disappeared is a dignified act of purpose-making.

Nevertheless, there are also resilient people in Kashmir and there are also profound psychological wounds that trauma theorists such as Cathy Caruth and Dori Laub can analyze. The concept of trauma presented by Caruth as an experience that is not claimed, an incident that comes back in its fragmented forms reflects the experiences of generations of Kashmiri people who experienced violence, midnight raids, loss, and the fear that is shadowing daily activities. The focus of testimony as a process of self-reconstruction by Laub is also echoed in the stories of the surviving victims where most of them finally come to live in the present as they talk, write or recall. Kashmir literature has a combative way of working with these structures: in *Curfewed Night* by Basharat Peer, memory is depicted as a wound; in *The Half Mother* by Shahnaz Bashir, the mother is destroyed by loss; Mirza Waheed’s *The Collaborator* is that of a youth haunted by the bodies of people he cannot inter, and Rahul Pandita, in *Our Moon Has Blood Clots*, addresses the subject of exile as wrought by a legacy. Such works serve not only as narratives, but as testimonies to recover voices that are frequently relegated to the fringes of official histories.

However, in Kashmiri culture, psychological misery is often explained in moral or spiritual terms, and not in clinical terms. This cultural framing is manifested even in such everyday phrases as: *Yeli ne cxe imanae chu, avae*

chuy depression (Your faith is weak, that's why you have depression); Cxe chuy ne Khudayas peth bharosae (You don't trust Allah); Yeli ne namaze pareith, adee kya gase? (When you don't pray, that's why you feel this way). These expressions demonstrate a community bargaining mental health by inherited beliefs which are at times comforting, and on other occasions, intensifying silence in relation to psychological pain. They demonstrate that there is no conflict between resilience and trauma: the same society where people possess a great deal of endurance is unable to define the emotional cost of warfare.

The strength of Kashmir is, then, not a romantic abstraction, or even a mere survival instinct, but a reconstruction of self and community in silence, out of the gaps caused by history. And maybe this is where the Kashmir game is still going on: on the shaky ground between remembering and refusing to surrender.

V. CONCLUSION

The case of Kashmir, its war, its broken families, its catalogue of silence and survival, are demonstrations of the extent to which trauma and endurance originate within the cultural and psychological landscape of the territory. By looking through the voices of such organizations as APDP, by looking through the lives of those who have lost their loved ones and who have strived to find them, and by looking through the voices of those who have tried to put into words the suffering of the people, Kashmir is revealed as not only a place of political struggle, but a place of great human continuity. Cathy Caruth and Dori Laub trauma theories can be used to interpret the fragmented, repetitive, and usually silent nature of Kashmiri memory, whereas the resilience frameworks of Ann Masten and Viktor Frankl can be used to understand how meaning, connection, and shared strength can help individuals and communities to overcome decades of adversity.

These experiences have been passed on through the hands of Kashmiri writers, poets and eyewitnesses and literature has become a potent instrument of memory and defiance. Their works are a witness of what no one will probably talk about: it is a mental load of the youth, the perennial sorrow of families, the silent endurance of mothers and the great streams of emotional power that submerge daily life. Meanwhile, the individual cultural beliefs about mental health show how the trauma is perceived and bargained into the social context, making clear how merciful and limited the communal understanding can become.

Ultimately, the Kashmir story is not just the story of loss. It is, too, a story of survival - of voices that keep on speaking, writing, meeting, and remembering even after decades of confusion. The narratives of the region help us

to remember that resilience does not mean that we are not hurting but rather we have chosen to continue creating meaning in the aftermath. And in its present remembrance, Kashmir simply tries to affirm that it is a human being, and trauma should not be the ultimate language of this community.

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Non-Advising Responses to Advice-Seeking on Xiaohongshu

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Abstract— As for research on advice pragmatics, *tingquan* (taking advice) is an unexplored trend, where beauty is a novel topic that abounds with intercultural responses. Although much good work has been done on sequential organization in online interactions, current studies seldom focus on sequential incoherence in advice-seeking posts, especially those in newer platforms, and lack in-depth analysis on to what extent the second pair part does not align with the first one. Drawing upon the Conversation Analytic notions of affiliation and alignment (Stivers, 2008; Stivers et al., 2011), this study chose hot *tingquan*-related posts from Xiaohongshu, a new leading social media and lifestyle platform in China, and aimed to examine responses to advice-seeking that do not give advice. The findings show that, while direct advice accounted for roughly a half, non-advising responses occupied a large proportion, providing encouragement, assessment, referral and related experience. Besides, while many non-advising responses aligned with the overall activity with an affiliative/neutral stance, a large number of non-aligning ones denied the validity of advice-seeking for supportive compliment and humor. Compared with replies to foreign users, replies to Chinese users were more direct and less polite, and contain more assessment, referral, and memes from the context of Chinese digital culture. To some extent, this study can shed light on *tingquan* as an ongoing trend.



Keywords— Advice-seeking, Affiliation, Alignment, Xiaohongshu

I. INTRODUCTION

Tingquan, literally meaning “taking advice,” represents an emerging mode of learning and social interaction that spans multiple aspects of daily life, including makeup, weight management, travel, interior design, and career choices. Data from Xiaohongshu, China’s Instagram-like platform, indicate that *tingquan* has become one of the top three lifestyle trends in 2023. Topics related to *tingquan* have accumulated over 900 million views, while search volume for the term has increased fifty-onefold year on year, and users have generated

approximately three million posts referencing *tingquan*. More recently, the trend has attracted the attention of international youth, who are downloading Xiaohongshu to participate in this beauty trend. Clutching a sign with the Chinese characters “*tingquan*”, they invite Chinese users to weigh in on how to improve their appearance. The origin of this trend can be traced to a widely circulated TikTok video, in which a blogger highlighted how Chinese netizens are actively helping others to improve their self-image.

Many researchers have begun to see advice as a

negotiated interaction that is highly context-sensitive, and focus on the process of seeking and providing advice online. As for research on advice pragmatics, *tingquan* is an unexplored trend, where beauty is a novel topic that abounds with intercultural responses. Drawing upon the Conversation Analytic notions of affiliation and alignment (Stivers, 2008; Stivers et al., 2011), this study chose hot *tingquan*-related posts from Xiaohongshu, a new leading social media and lifestyle platform in China, and aims to explore the asymmetry between advice-seeking and the responses, in the hope of shedding light on *tingquan* as an ongoing trend.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Seeking and Giving Advice

Research on advice pragmatics is extensive, and many scholars regard advice as a negotiated interaction that is highly context-sensitive (Locher, 2013; Stommel, 2016; Lu, 2024). For instance, Hudson (1990) defined an advice interaction as a situation where individuals act as advice-giver and/or advice-seeker, and the subsequent interactions between these two parties. Generally, advice-seeking is described as indirect (indicated by the telling of a problem) or direct (such as questions, statements of uncertainty, and appeals for help) (Locher, 2013), and can be distinguished from information-seeking by a typical problem description (Plnick, 2001). Accordingly, indirect advice can be expressed as interrogatives, declaratives, and non-agentive statements, while direct advice as imperatives, modal verbs of necessity or overt recommendations, which leads to future action (Locher, 2013).

Most studies have limited their investigation to specific contexts, such as health institutions (Bloch & Antaki, 2022) and education institutions (Badem-Korkmaz et al., 2022; Park, 2012). Except for offline settings, recent work has explored advice interactions in digital contexts, such as in forums (Morrow, 2012; Placencia, 2012), columns (Locher, 2013), counseling sessions (Stommel, 2016) and even commercial platforms (Yuan & Jin, 2023).

To sum up, former research can shed light on the framework of this study. As technology improves, multi-sided platforms and interactions have the potential to generate innovations. Therefore, more work can be done

on exploring the relationship between user interaction and language choices, and the influence of online environment on advice interactions.

2.2 Sequential (In)coherence in Online Interaction

Researchers have applied Conversational Analysis (CA) to understand how sequences of messages are organized in online interactions. This approach, sometimes referred to as Digital Conversation Analysis, emphasizes the use of CA tools in different online channels, with the understanding of the given platform or medium, instead of equating them directly with spoken conversation (Giles et al., 2017; Pauluset al., 2016; Meredith, 2017). The particularities of online forums include asynchronous tempo, the prevalence of long turns (posts and comments), and writers' intentional choices of dominant or response-worthy actions (Stommel & Koole, 2010).

In sequential organization, the connection between the first and the second part of an adjacency pair is typically tight, which is demonstrated in dyadic spoken interaction, and may become somewhat looser in written multi-party interactions (Meredith, 2019). After a digression, one is expected to return to the main line and provide the missing second pair part (Schegloff, 2007). The asymmetrical relationship has been examined in various institutional settings, including medical interaction (Leppänen, 1998), counseling sessions (Park, 2012; Pudlinski, 2002), etc. Since sequential incoherence may cause misunderstandings, many studies have focused on how coherence can be maintained, such as through quoting (Gibson, 2009) and addressing (Licoppe & Morel, 2012). Meanwhile, several scholars have noticed that loosened coherence can be reasonable, and have its advantages. For instance, Herring (1999) revealed that the main sources of structural incoherence in online interaction is caused by a high level of disrupted adjacency, overlapping exchanges and asynchronous feedback, while user adaption, heightened interactivity and playfulness make computer-mediated communication popular. Stommel and Koole (2010) suggested that the lack of a second part is unproblematic in asynchronous written interactions, such as emails and forums, since the post can be understood as telling, having no need of responses.

To sum up, from a conversation analytical perspective, the connection between the first and second pair parts in

asynchronous online interaction is different from that in synchronous face-to-face communication. However, current studies seldom focus on sequential incoherence in advice-seeking posts, and lack in-depth analysis on to what extent the second pair part does not align with the first one.

2.3 Affiliation and Alignment

Affiliation and alignment are two important analytical notions in CA. Influenced by preference, lexico-grammatical features, prosody, timing, turn-design, visual conduct and some other factors, responses are specific to the initiating or prior actions (Lee & Tanaka, 2016; Stivers & Rossano, 2010). Responding actions are shown to be closely fitted with the initiating ones, or somewhat mobilized, along the dimensions of (dis)affiliation and (dis)alignment.

Affiliation pertains to the affective or action level of cooperation (Stivers, 2008; Stivers et al., 2011). More specifically, affiliative responses are said to be “maximally pro-social when they match the prior speaker’s evaluative stance, display empathy and/or cooperate with the preference of the prior action” (Stivers et al., 2011). Therefore, affiliative responses can involve two interrelated but slightly different facets: the degrees of support for the prior speaker’s affective stance, as in the context of storytelling (Couper-Kuhlen, 2012; Stivers, 2008); and whether the response accords with the action preference, as in preferred responses to initiating actions of requests, offers, invitations, etc. (Lee & Tanaka, 2016).

Alignment refers to the structural symmetry of cooperation (Stivers, 2008; Stivers et al., 2011). More specifically, aligning responses cooperate by “facilitating the proposed activity or sequence, accepting the presuppositions and terms of the proposed action or activity, and matching the formal design preference of the turn” (Stivers et al., 2011). For instance, type-conforming responses are constructed with a lexical item projected by the question, such as yes or no in English (Raymond, 2003). Furthermore, research has found that responding actions can align or disalign with the initiating action, apart from whether they affiliate with the question (Raymond, 2003), and disaligning responses can be used to achieve cooperation at the level of affective or evaluative stance (Lee & Tanaka, 2016).

Although the concepts of affiliation and alignment are distinct from each another, the design and conduct of responses may involve interplay of the two. For instance, focusing on Reddit as a unique online discussion forum that is still understudied, Lu (2024) explored the types of moves used in several subreddits’ advice-giving, investigated the association between moves and upvotes, and suggested that advice-givers’, auditors’ and overhearers’ perceptions of the interactional goals seem to be misaligned. However, based on affiliative stance and action alignment, Vepsäläinen (2022) revealed that although without producing the requested action, most responses that did not align with the action did align with the overall activity, or another action made relevant by the preceding message.

To summarize, much good work has been done on advice pragmatics, and sequential organization in online interactions. However, current studies seldom focus on sequential incoherence in advice-seeking posts, especially those in newer online platforms, and lack in-depth analysis on to what extent the second pair part does not align with the first one. Drawing upon the Conversation Analytic notions of affiliation and alignment (Stivers, 2008; Stivers et al., 2011), this study chose hot tingquan-related posts from Xiaohongshu, a new leading social media and lifestyle platform in China, and aims to examine responses to advice-seeking that do not give advice, in the hope of shedding light on tingquan as an ongoing trend. The three specific research questions are as follows:

- (1) What are the functions of responses that do not give advice?
- (2) What types of stance do these responses display towards the advice-seeking?
- (3) What are the differences between responses to foreign users and responses to Chinese users?

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Data Collection

The data consisted of comments under 10 tingquan-related posts from Xiaohongshu. Also known as RED or Little Red Book, Xiaohongshu is a social media and e-commerce platform focusing on user-generated content in fashion, beauty, and lifestyle, and has 300 million active users nowadays. The post and the comments

create a threaded tree-like structure, in which each response can begin a new branch, and have an unlimited number of responses (Vepsäläinen, 2022). In order to detect the asymmetry between the initiating action and the responding action, this study just focused on the responses to the original post. Using “听劝 (tingquan)” as the search term, 5 posts of foreign users and 5 posts of Chinese users were selected based on the comprehensive sorting, each of which contains more than 500 comments, thus can achieve maximum variation to a great extent. These posts are the advice-seekers’ first posts for appearance improvement, thus the comments contain no assessment of the follow-up. In consideration of ethical issues, usernames and images were excluded.

Table 1: Sources of Data

Posts	Number of Posts	Number of Comments
By Chinese users	5	2,880
By Foreign users	5	3,725

3.2 Data Analysis

This study qualitatively classified the comments by using NVivo 14.

To answer question 1, this study first explored the types of moves used in the selected comments, and identified the proportion of non-advising responses. As seen in Table 2, adapted from Lu (2024)’s research on advice interactions on Reddit, the coding scheme involves five main moves. Direct advice refers to explicit suggestions provided by the commenters. Encouragement includes compliments. Referral provides another source of information or frame of reference. Assessment provides evaluations of the information given in the original post. Experience sharing refers to the commenters’ own experience or the experience of someone else. Comments of less relevance are excluded, such as tagging others by type the @ symbol followed by their usernames.

Table 2: Types of Moves

Moves	Example from the data
Direct advice	头发蓬松一点，卷个大波浪，可以弄个法式八字刘海 You could add more volume to your

hair, make big waves, and try French curtain bangs.
小姐姐好美，不用改造都迷死我了
Encouragement You’re already so beautiful; you don’t need any changes to impress me.
在小红书上搜索一下“梨型身材”，会看到很多适合需要的建议
Referral You can search “pear-shaped body” on Xiaohongshu and find lots of helpful suggestions.
你的身材看上去很健康，这种圆润壮实的体型虽然不太符合当下亚洲大多数人的审美，但其实一点儿问题都没有
Assessment Your body looks very healthy. This fuller, solid body type may not match current Asian beauty standards, but there’s absolutely nothing wrong with it.
和我理工男老公好像，我学设计的，我自己穿着打扮特别注重，我朋友都觉得我和他在一起很神奇，他经常穿的像个渔夫
Experience sharing You look like my engineer husband. I studied design and care a lot about fashion, so my friends think it’s funny that we’re together. He often dresses like a fisherman.

To answer question 2, each case of non-advice was then analyzed in terms of alignment and affiliation. As seen in Table 3, two types were mainly identified based on Vepsäläinen (2022)’s classification: accepting and denying the validity of the advice-seeking. Validity here refers to being “solvable” or “advice-worthy”.

Table 3: Types of Stance

Alignment	Affiliation	
	Affiliative/Neutral	Disaffiliative
Aligning with the overall activity	Accepting	Denying
Non-aligning	Accepting	Denying

To answer question 3, comments to foreign users and comments to Chinese users were finally contrasted based on above procedures.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 The Functions of Non-Advising Responses

Table 4: Quantification of Move Analysis Results

Moves	Responses to Foreign Users	Responses to Chinese Users
Direct advice	53.28%	47.72%
Encouragement	32.90%	29.41%
Assessment	4.52%	6.21%
Referral	2.67%	5.13%
Experience sharing	0.81%	0.61%

As seen in Table 4, direct advice accounts for roughly a half in both types, which can reflect Chinese netizens' helpfulness and kindness. Meanwhile, non-advising responses occupy a large proportion, and can provide encouragement, assessment, referral and related experience based on the move analysis.

First, encouragement ranks the second, and appears slightly more in responses to foreign users. As a relationally-oriented move, it can help fulfill the supportive aspect of advice (Locher, 2013). Comparatively, the assessment move can be face-threatening, since the advice-giver may point out the problems brutally, or reject the advice-seekers' self-evaluation. In responses to Chinese users, the commenters provide more assessment rather than fake politeness, especially negative evaluations on slovenly males. Moreover, referral provides another source of information or frame of reference, and appears more in replies to Chinese users, probably because the commenters are more likely to associate them with domestic influencers or celebrities, and believe that they are better at using domestic platforms for retrieval. Lastly, sharing experiences is noticed in several comments, which may facilitate rapport building between the advice-giver and advice-seeker by reinforcing similar or core values (Lu, 2024).

4.2 The Stance of Non-Advising Response

4.2.1 Accepting the Validity of the Advice-Seeking

Non-advising responses may nonetheless accept the validity of the advice-seeking. The users accept the post's ground for seeking advice, and their stance may be affiliative or neutral. In other words, the users may align with the overall activity or be non-aligning in a topically

coherent manner.

First, aligning with the overall activity means that although responses that do not provide advice are not aligned with the request for advice, they still take part or display interest in solving the problem. Except for requesting and providing advice, the process of problem-solving involves other parts, such as noting the problem and assessing the problem. Inconsistent with Vepsäläinen (2022)'s case, the original posts are usually concise and straightforward, not involving lengthy stories. Therefore, this study did not differentiate troubles-telling from advice-seeking, and the commenters' attitudes were thought to be relevant to the overall process. As seen in Example 1 and 2, keen netizens will specify the problems while suggesting improvement to both foreign and domestic users.

Example 1

本人骨相皮相底子都很好，皮相还带点东方感，皮肤又白，所以金色头发只会显得整个人更苍白。眉毛太高且有种用力睁大眼睛的感觉，让人感觉眉头太用力了。把眉头用力这个肌肉习惯改掉，放松眼部。

Your facial structure and skin are already very good, with a bit of an Eastern look, and your skin is quite fair. Blonde hair would only make you look paler. Your eyebrows sit a bit too high, and it looks like you're forcing your eyes open. Try to relax that muscle habit and keep your eye area more relaxed.

Example 2

乍一看，你最大的问题就是仪态，弯腰驼背，缩头塌肩，就算你是满分，也能扣成零蛋。可以练练站桩功，基础剑法招式。坚持个一年，脱胎换骨。

At first glance, your biggest issue is posture -- slouching, hunching forward, and rounded shoulders. Even with great looks, poor posture can ruin the overall impression. You could practice stance training and basic sword movements. If you stick with it for a year, you will completely transform your posture and presence.

Second, non-aligning comments can be on-topic but off-action in this case. Even though the commenters occasionally display an orientation to the normative structure of adjacency pairs, these responding actions are neither treated as disruptive nor reacted to in any particular manner. They are rare, but still an essential part of online discussion. One possible reason for this might be that

previous responses have already given the necessary advice, which allows others to have a more “unstructured” discussion on the topic (Vepsäläinen, 2022). As seen in Example 3, since the American girl replies many comments politely, the commenter accepts her ground for seeking advice, and expresses the willingness to help her, but no advice was provided.

Example 3

从你的回复中能感觉到你是一个礼貌的人，不像其他外国人问完压根不理人，我们更于对友善的朋友提供建议。

From your replies, I can tell you are very polite. We really appreciate friendly people like you who will respond after asking questions, and we are happy to give more advice.

To sum up, in this section, non-advising responses can nevertheless align with the overall activity, or they can be non-aligning in rare cases. They are not fitted second pair parts to advice-seeking as the main action, but can be a step towards advice-giving, and display either neutral or affiliative stance towards the original post.

4.2.2 Denying the Validity of the Advice-Seeking

In this section, the advice-seeker is not regarded as a sincere person with a genuine problem to be solved, thus the validity of the advice-seeking is somehow problematic. The comments display a disaffiliative stance towards the original post, and can be further divided into two types: In basic cases, the non-advising responses may align with the overall activity or be non-aligning in a topically coherent manner, similar to previous cases in which advice-givers regard the posts as advice-worthy; in special cases, the comments appear to provide advice, whereas the advice is not genuine.

In basic cases, the original posts are explicitly judged as fictitious or unnecessary. While disagreeing with the original posts, the comments usually take the form of compliment and encouragement. As seen in Example 4, in order to reply the American girl, the commenter uses a translator, making the reply soft and polite. Since the girl seems to be good enough, the advice for her is she does not have to change her fashion style. Similarly, as shown in Example 5, while replying a Chinese beauty, the commenter seems to be a watching judge for the advice-seekers, and proposes that she does not have to

change her appearance. The linguistic style seems to be less polite and more direct.

Example 4

You're perfect and there's no need to change. You look very, very good.

Example 5

美人胚子，不用改造，下一个

You're naturally beautiful, no makeover needed. Next one.

Besides, non-aligning responses occupy a large proportion. They are not second pair parts or other fitted responses to the post, nor do they display an affiliative stance towards it. Instead, they use the topic of the post as a springboard to initiate a new action. As reflected by Example 6, some commenters are not kind to the foreigners. They may think it strange that a large number of foreigners have flooded in the platform within a short time, clutching a sign with the Chinese characters for changing their appearance, or suppose that the post is pretending to seek advice, but is actually attracting attention.

Example 6

涌入一大批莫名其妙举牌子说要改造的外国 ip, 莫名其妙。

A bunch of foreign accounts suddenly showed up asking for makeovers. It's kind of weird.

你讲话和标点符号真像中国人装德国人。

The way you write and use punctuation really feels like a Chinese person pretending to be German.

Despite of several negative comments, many responses try to use memes or confession for humor, implying their disaffiliative stance towards the advice-seeking. As seen in Example 7, “Li Hua”, the name of a student who frequently appears in the annual national college entrance exam, always makes students joke about why they are always asked to write a letter on behalf of Li. As seen in Example 8, if the foreigners are pretty or handsome, there is no lack of admirers in the comments.

Example 7

假如你是李华，收到外国朋友 Intraveil 想你询问如何改变自己的外在形象，希望你给出一些建议。请写一封回信，提出你的建议。

Suppose you are Li Hua. Your foreign friend Intraveil wrote to ask how to improve their appearance and

hopes you can give some advice. Please write a reply letter and provide your suggestions.

Example 8

Honey, do you have wechat? Can I add you if I can? I really think you're beautiful. If you don't have it that's fine. We can be friends!!

When replying to Chinese users, the memes are more easily understood by Chinese netizens, and the confession of love is exaggerated, which are hard to be translated. As seen in Example 9, the comment is taken from *Empresses in the Palace* (*Zhen Huan Zhuan*), a famous Chinese TV series. In response to a good-looking youth, the commenter visualizes herself as the emperor, who can always appreciate new faces. As seen in Example 10, the statement seems to be rambling and ridiculous due to the use of rhyme.

Example 9

新来的吗, 朕怎么从未见过你?

Are you new here? How have you escaped my notice until now?

Example 10

我的妈我的姥, 我的褂子我的袄, 我的大脑变大枣, 我的老公你别跑。

Oh my mom, oh my granny, my coat and my jacket, my brain turned to a date, my hubby, don't panic!

In special cases, the second pair parts to advice-seeking are mock advice, which also have a humor effect. As seen in Example 11, the foreign poster expects to look better when being photographed with Beckham. The commenter does not actually suggest him wear a bra of the brand, but makes a pun to suggest Beckham's wife.

Example 11

-- 太激动了后天要和贝克汉姆同框, 我该怎么变帅大家帮帮我! 有贝克汉姆十分之一帅就行!

I'm so excited! The day after tomorrow I'll be in the same frame as Beckham. How can I look my best? Even being one-tenth as handsome as him would be enough!

-- 穿维多利亚的 secret。

Wearing Victoria's Secret.

As shown by Example 12, in responses to Chinese users, the tone of mother tongue seems to more animated. When replying to the handsome man, the commenter pretends to show an affiliative stance towards his problems,

but actually jokes about meeting him as a new friend, rather than as an advice-seeker.

Example 12

你这, 唉我说你这问题也太多了, 三言两语说不明白, 这样吧你来我这我给你看看, 不要钱, 交个朋友好吧, 一般来我这的人都得交, 我真心想救你就算了, 你赶紧过来吧。

Wow, that's a lot to fix. I can't explain it all here. Just come to me and I'll help you in person. No fee -- let's call it making a friend. Usually people have to pay, but I truly want to save you, so I'll let it slide. Come over quickly.

To sum up, similar to non-advising responses that accept the validity of advice-seeking, those denying the validity may align with the overall activity, or be non-aligning in a topically coherent manner. The greatest difference lies in that the denying replies display a disaffiliative stance towards the original post. While many non-advising responses align with the overall activity with an affiliative/neutral stance, a large number of non-aligning ones deny the validity of the advice-seeking for supportive compliment and humor. Compared with replies to foreign users, replies to Chinese users are more direct and less polite, and contain more memes from the context of Chinese digital culture.

V. CONCLUSION

Drawing upon the Conversation Analytic concepts of affiliation and alignment (Stivers, 2008; Stivers et al., 2011), this study investigated replies to advice-seeking that do not give advice, and focused on tingquan as an unexplored trend on Xiaohongshu, where beauty is a novel topic that abounds with intercultural responses. The findings show that, while direct advice accounted for roughly a half, non-advising responses occupied a large proportion, and could provide encouragement, assessment, referral and related experience. Besides, while many non-advising responses aligned with the overall activity with an affiliative/neutral stance, a large number of non-aligning ones denied the validity of advice-seeking for supportive compliment and humor. Compared with replies to foreign users, replies to Chinese users were more direct and less polite, and contain more assessment, referral, and memes from the context of Chinese digital culture. To some extent, this study can shed light on tingquan as an

ongoing trend.

This study still has limitations. In data collection, the textual comments were merely selected from 10 tingquan-related posts for beauty advice, which were posted by users of different ages, genders and looks. In move analysis, the moves were classified with assumptions, based on the coding scheme of former research. In stance analysis, some cases were unmarked: some comments did not directly accept or deny the validity of advice-seeking, and might be affiliative or disaffiliative. In the future, further studies should also consider the influence of topicality, the interactivity of a given platform, the context of digital culture and other influential factors, and can incorporate images from a multimodal perspective.

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Displacement and Ethical Belonging in Nadine Gordimer's *July's People*

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Abstract— This research paper examines the interrelated themes of displacement and moral belonging in Nadine Gordimer's *July's People* (1981), a narrative set amid the potential collapse of apartheid South Africa. Gordimer flips the script on the current power structures by making the white Smales family move to the rural area where their black servant, July, lives. This exposes how fragile social privilege is. Displacement in the novel doesn't just mean moving around; it also means being confused about culture, psychology, and morals. The Smales' loss of authority demonstrates that in apartheid society, race, ownership, and economic power were prioritised over mutual recognition and moral accountability. The argument asserts that Gordimer depicts belonging as an ethical construct rather than a territorial or legal framework. July's ambiguous status, simultaneously potent and constrained, illustrates the moral complexities of survival, loyalty, and freedom in a society undergoing violent transformation. The novel disrupts existing identities, forcing readers to confront challenging questions of dependence, responsibility, and the possibility of cohabitation beyond hierarchical frameworks. This work utilises meticulous textual analysis to demonstrate how *July's People* challenges liberal humanism ideals and exposes the limitations of sympathy under persistent structural unfairness. The study argues that Gordimer does not offer a conciliatory view of belonging; rather, she portrays it as a contested and arduous process shaped by history, fear, and ethical considerations. The novel remains a profound exploration of how displacement can compel individuals to reassess their understanding of belonging in postcolonial contexts.



Keywords— Displacement, Ethical Belonging, Apartheid, Power Relations, Postcolonial Ethics.

Gordimer was born into a family of white minorities on November 20, 1923; her father was of Jewish descent, and her mother was of English descent. The politically sanctioned framework of racial segregation and the interplay among racial groups in South Africa would subsequently influence and motivate her. During her adolescence, Gordimer initiated her first confrontation with racism. She realised that Black youngsters were prohibited from entering the library she often visited. Notwithstanding her limited education, she devoted herself and her writings to advancing and enhancing her homeland. Since the publication of her initial works, "Oral History" and *July's People*, she has "devoted her career to composing collections that address the racial strife afflicting her

homeland" (Gordimer, "Oral History" 3). Gordimer is renowned for her books and short stories, including *The Conservationist*, *Burger's Daughter*, *My Son's Story*, *The Soft Voice of the Serpent*, and *Jump and Other Stories*, which address the difficulties of her country. These writings examine the dynamics among South Africa's ethnic groupings, occasionally employing humour, as shown in *The Conservationist*. Generally, Gordimer is the principal essayist born to a non-South African parent who ultimately "did not return to the metropolitan culture that engendered imperial literature" (Greenstein 27). She resides in South Africa, believing it to be integral to her identity, and is resolute in her pursuit of establishing herself as an African writer.

Gordimer's texts, although written in English, did not reflect English style but rather embodied South African style with all its characteristics. They contended that she is affiliated with white individuals, who are the originators and architects of racism and the apartheid state; hence, how could she authentically write about those she does not know well? Although she was white, she did not characterise Africa in the same manner as other whites. Her narrative "exhibits a distinctly specific Africa" (228), neither an empty realm prepared for white colonisation nor a lamentable aspect of the existing apartheid state. Gordimer's political perspective, articulated in her writings, especially in *The July's People*, was influenced by her affiliation with a specific twentieth-century white English-speaking demographic. The twentieth century was distinguished by the emergence of African patriotism and the accomplishments of Afrikaner nationalism. In South Africa, English-speaking citizens faced a challenging situation akin to discrimination rather than any other concept. Due to linguistic and cultural differences, they were excluded from both Afrikaner and African nationalism because of their physical characteristics.

In *July's People*, this disconcerting predicament is revealed through Maureen's ambivalence as the protagonist, torn between assimilating into black culture like her family members, especially her three children, and renouncing her previous beliefs, or escaping to reclaim her former esteemed lifestyle. Gordimer does not perceive herself as an English descendant; yet, "South African politics render her an 'outsider' to the experiences of the majority of her compatriots, and imperial literature continues to influence her fiction" (King 207). As an outsider in what she perceives as her home, she draws on British literary elements to articulate her perspective on events in her nation. This stance arises from the concept of the South African context, wherein "a book is valued by political powers rather than abstract powers" (Gordimer, *The Novel and the Nation in South Africa* 33). She contends that the author, of whom she is one, ought to engage with the significant aspects of human existence and refrain from confining themselves to their cultural and ethnic background within their own setting. Gordimer, a South African nationalist, contended the concept of "super-identity" in South Africa (34). This super-identity was established to avert crises and divisiveness among South Africans. Gordimer's sensitivity to the contemporary atmosphere and discourses of South Africa is evident in her writings.

One of her renowned and impactful novels is *The July's People*. It was released in 1981 as her original translation of the conclusion, before the collapse of the Apartheid regime. It was banned in Gordimer's native

country, South Africa, upon its publication. The narrative unfolds in an imagined chamber amidst a civil conflict between black and white populations in South Africa. Whites relinquish their rule over blacks and their supremacy. The designer positions the Smales amidst stark contrasts during an unconscious period when the whites were oblivious to the situation and the blacks were uncertain about their circumstances. The Smales is a Caucasian family residing in a predominantly dark neighbourhood in Johannesburg, accompanied by their former dark servant, who is a war refugee. The novel serves as a compelling example of Gordimer's oeuvre, exploring the dynamics of white behaviour towards black individuals and the corresponding reactions of the latter. It embodies the author's vision and her pursuit of "her own African perspective in a nation experiencing increasing black-and-white divisions" (King 208). The work also embodies the author's dissent with the government's decision to use Afrikaans as the medium of research in some African universities instead of English. This official initiative sought to limit the access of Black individuals to the broader world and compel them to acknowledge their subordinate status through the study of the native language of Apartheid.

This study employs a qualitative, textual-analytical methodology rooted in literary criticism to analyse this study. The source text is scrutinised through close reading, with emphasis on narrative structure, characterisation, spatial transitions, and symbolic depictions of power and identity. The research is underpinned by postcolonial theory, namely the notions of displacement, liminality, and ethical responsibility, utilising the analytical frameworks of scholars such as Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Emmanuel Levinas. Secondary sources, such as peer-reviewed journal articles, critical essays, and Gordimer's non-fiction, are utilised to situate the novel within the discourse of apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. The methodology employs comparative thematic analysis to examine the changing dynamics of belonging between the coloniser and the colonised. By combining textual evidence with ethical and postcolonial theory, the study seeks to develop a sophisticated understanding of how Gordimer examines moral belonging during periods of social and political turmoil.

The July's People, like some of Gordimer's earlier books, is about the relationship between the races. This is shown through the relationship between Maureen, the main character, and other characters, especially her servant, July. The book also shows a change in the balance of power. This change could help explain why whites were treating blacks badly earlier. The first chapter makes it obvious that blacks are always seen as white servants, not as their saviours. The

strange situation that Maureen, the hero, discovers on their first morning in the indigenous town, where they are staying with a relative, "July, their worker, their host" (Gordimer, *July's People* 23). Gordimer discusses a divided culture in *July's People*, which is depicted and mirrored in her fictional characters. In this job, racism isn't just about being physically separated; it's also about being emotionally racist. This is because physical and mental racism usually go together, and a person who is racist probably doesn't think about what they're doing. In other words, they don't care about the results of a person's actions while they are being performed. Readers see two parts of the book that show how whites and blacks are physically separate. The first is their separation before the war, as seen in their old house in Johannesburg. The second situation is when the Smales live in July's mother-in-law's house in July. This physical separation is also accompanied by emotional prejudice and isolation. Maureen's bad attitude in July shows that she is mentally racist. Maureen has been July's employer for fifteen years, and she still acts that way.

In her lecture, she acknowledges her action of saving them, as stated in the book "Frog Prince, Saviour, July" (11), although she maintains that it was his duty as a servant to do so. Gordimer viewed Maureen as "the last pioneer lady" (qtd. in Manivannan 743) because she was organised and cared for by men who were connected to her from father to husband, including the black servant in July, who looked after her and attempted to keep her out of danger and comfort. These actions exemplify a conventional colonial mindset, asserting that "a typical colonial attitude-that the white woman has a guy who takes care of her" (743). Maureen considers Bam's terrible behaviour and failure to save them from the situation to be a betrayal. July's refusal to find the weapon as the ultimate defender of white supremacy is a betrayal of their long-standing cooperation, which she thought was based on their mutual respect. During apartheid, educated, liberal white mistresses like Maureen were just as guilty of unconscious patriotism as their male counterparts. The shift she's made is so rapid that it harms Maureen's reputation and racial standing. She goes to "another moment, location, awareness" (Gordimer, *July's People* 29) since her prior life has changed. She feels like a different person almost as soon as she gets to the village, "She wasn't what she was" (29). No fiction could compete with what she learnt she didn't know, couldn't have imagined or discovered through imagination. This would explain how their lives and power changed from whites who thought they were better than the blacks who used to work for them.

Also, when she realises that she needs July more than him, her pride as a former employer is completely gone. She thought of the time before when she and his wife

used to give him money. But after getting closer to them, she realises that they don't need what she believed they were doing. Maureen feels she has to change how she acts around him because she sees a different version of herself: the one from July. Even though people try to change her mind and make her actions seem right, Maureen always has a reason for her actions and a reason to blame herself. But Maureen is attempting to figure out why July helped them get away from the city's end of the world. She could perceive that he's "not an easy man" (60).

She thought he was simple and not too complicated, which made her think he was like a civilised, upper-class (white) person. She couldn't even understand him because his servant spoke English poorly. Along with all of these things, she has done, Maureen and even her husband, Bam, are being unpleasant to him, especially when he won't do anything. For example, Maureen accuses July of taking small things from her in Johannesburg, even though July won't take care of the lost weapon. This claim stems from the belief that she is the master and that her servant wants to steal everything she has. Her husband, Bam, and Maureen, in addition to treating July like she's not as good as them, also treat her like she's not as good as them. He did this mostly because he lost his property and job. He loses his power and position when his chequebook and high-profile job as an architect are no longer useful in the local economy. Bam is less of a man because he lost his things. When the valuable weapon is found stolen:

He lay his back, on that bed ... furthermore, all of a sudden moved over his face, as the dad had never done his children ... She looked down on that individual who had nothing, presently. Prior to these children there was something much more terrible than seeing the wide posteriors of ladies, squatting. (25)

Bam is left with nothing but guilt because he doesn't know who he is without his money, job, car, and gun. He abruptly gives up his responsibilities and values. The Smales couple's actions and attitudes towards their dark-skinned servant, July, and his family in general were a way for the *July's People* to communicate about discrimination. To live separate from them or to act differently. Whether acting differently by living separately from them, and even not giving their culture and way of life any credit.

People in July think of their identity in two ways: as black or as white. The book is based on the two battles. The two main heroes are July and Maureen, who represent the two characters. Maureen tried to keep up with racial domination and prevalence, but July responded differently

than he had for the past fifteen years. He got more complicated and hostile because he thought she was better than him. The term 'July People' is the first hint of black identity in the book. It tells us to look for these blacks and learn more about them. The novel increasingly reveals the black identity. The novel first shows black identity in South Africa through the Maureen-July link, a master-servant relationship. People thought of blacks as servants, simple servants. Or what Gordimer said: "the fairly paid and placated male hireling, living in their yard since they were hitched, wearing two arrangements of regalia ... allowed his companions to visit him and his city spouse to lay down with him in his room" (11). This would make black people depend on white people, but the actuality is the opposite: as the Smales couples learn throughout the book, they depended on their servant more than they thought.

Maureen was also astonished by the tribal structure of the black people because she usually saw the social system as being based on the family rather than the tribe. People all around Africa know about this plan, but each tribe has its own rules and standards. On her first day in the village of July, Maureen woke up and saw that the tribal hut was lit up in some way. To live in harmony with nature instead of relying on the white stuff and way of life. They also move their "small funds around the bases of nature" when they build their buildings. They let the walls of mud sink back into the mud, then use that mud to build new walls (31). Africans employ this kind of architect to demolish the white architectural values that Bam, as a white architect, stands for. So, keeping the black identity made the white identity feel bad and made no sense. In addition to the people of July sticking to their own way of life and personalities, when they interacted with the blacks, the Smales adopted black culture less, save for Maureen, who felt compromised by it. Her daughter, Gina, learnt more about African culture and got along well with black ladies. She even eats "mealie-supper with her fingers" with other little girls from a shared pot (47). The dad was even involved in the village's life. Bam is talking to other guys and attempting to make him comprehend. Also, in July, Maureen got pushier. He slowly fights back against her, using words that don't convey fear at first:

Me? I must know who is stealing your things? Same like always. You make too much trouble for me. Here in my home too. Daniel, the chief, my-mother- my-wife with the house. Trouble, trouble from you. I don't want it anymore. You see? His hands flung out away from himself. You've got to get it back. No no. No no. Hysterically smiling repeating... She was stampeded by a wild rush of need to destroy everything between them. (26)

The moment captures a decisive ethical rupture shaped by spatial and social displacement. July's insistence on his domestic authority signals a shift from enforced service to self-assertion, making visible the strain of being held responsible for conflicts not of his making. His refusal to intervene reflects an ethical boundary being drawn, where former expectations of obedience are no longer sustainable. Maureen's agitated response, marked by emotional excess, reveals her inability to accept this reconfigured relationship. Her impulse to erase the distance between them paradoxically underscores its permanence. The scene thus exposes how displacement dismantles assumed moral entitlements and recasts belonging as an unstable, contested process shaped by power, responsibility, and refusal.

In *July's People*, displacement functions not merely as physical relocation but as a radical ethical disorientation that destabilises inherited identities, privileges, and moral certainties. The forced movement of the Smales family from their affluent urban home to July's rural village in the aftermath of political upheaval in South Africa exposes the fragility of white liberal humanism when stripped of institutional power. This displacement dismantles the illusion of ethical superiority that Maureen and Bamford Smales associate with their progressive ideals, revealing how deeply their sense of belonging is contingent upon racial and economic dominance. Gordimer constructs ethical belonging as a contested and shifting process rather than a stable moral position. The reversal of power relations in the village foregrounds July's ambiguous authority, positioned between servitude and agency. While July gains material and symbolic control, his ethical belonging remains unresolved, as his loyalties are fractured between traditional kinship obligations and the residual expectations imposed by the Smales. This liminal status complicates simplistic readings of empowerment, suggesting that displacement produces ethical ambiguity rather than moral resolution.

Maureen's psychological estrangement becomes particularly significant in this context. Her inability to ethically inhabit the new social order reflects the collapse of colonial frameworks that once guaranteed her identity and security. The loss of linguistic, spatial, and bodily autonomy forces her to confront the limits of empathy and cross-racial solidarity. Ethical belonging, for Maureen, is no longer grounded in intention but in accountability, a demand she ultimately fails to negotiate. Through these fractured relationships, Gordimer critiques the notion of universal belonging in a society structured by historical violence. Displacement in *July's People* thus emerges as an ethical test that exposes the uneven distribution of vulnerability and responsibility. Belonging, the novel suggests, cannot be

ethically claimed without confronting the asymmetries of power that persist even in moments of apparent reversal.

CONCLUSION

Gordimer's *July's People* leaves readers not with answers but with unease. The book doesn't see political change as a time of peace or moral clarity; instead, it shows how hard it can be for people to live without familiar structures of power and safety. Displacement makes people question what they thought they knew, putting them in situations where old habits, beliefs, and relationships don't work anymore. What happens is not renewal, but instead confusion, stress, and emotional strain. Gordimer shows how hard it is to trust someone who has a long history of being unequal to others. This is what happens when the relationship between July and the Smales changes. When things change, power doesn't just go away; it stays in people's attitudes, expectations, and silences. Fear and misunderstanding make attempts to live together weak and incomplete, thereby weakening the ethical connection. The book suggests that just being in the same place or going through the same hard times doesn't mean you belong to each other. Gordimer's story ends without a resolution, reflecting how hard it is for a society to redefine itself after injustice. *July's People* remind us that claiming a place in a group isn't easy or quick. It requires you to look at yourself in a way that makes you uncomfortable and be honest about your past. In this way, the book speaks strongly to postcolonial realities, showing that ethical belonging is still a hard, ongoing process rather than a completed goal.

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Posthuman Childhood: Loss of Wonder and Social Exclusion in the Digital Age with reference to *Childhood 2.0*

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Abstract— *The everyday of children in the contemporary digital is filled with technologically saturated environments where screens, algorithms, and immersive media shape their experiences. This epistemological and ontological paradigm shift leaves them in a state where the basic sensory experiences of curiosity and wonder are displaced by digitally mediated forms. This results in the emergence of a new subjectivity with heightened dependence on simulated experiences, and the gradual erosion of spontaneous exploration. Theoretical insights from Jean Baudrillard and Rosi Braidotti provide critical tools to understand these transformations. Jean Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality and Rosi Braidotti's posthuman childhood give in depth analysis of how children are engaged in constant entanglement with technological systems affecting their emotional and cognitive environment. Both the theories offer a broader perspective of the posthuman condition wherein children's lived realities are mediated by AI-driven infrastructures that restructure their emotional landscapes and social relations. Against this backdrop, the present study examines the documentary *Children 2.0* to analyse how digital ecologies and AI-mediated platforms contribute to children's seclusion, mental vulnerability, and diminishing real-world curiosity. By situating the documentary within posthuman and hyperreality frameworks, the study aims to critically map the emerging contours of childhood in the age of artificial intelligence.*



Keywords— *Childhood- Posthuman- Hyperreality-Altered Subjectivities-Social Exclusion*

Childhood has been considered as the most important phase in the lives of humans as it is the formative stage where the moulding of an individual takes place. This phase is marked by innocence, imagination, curiosity along with cognitive and emotional growth. Researches have shown that those with inquisitive minds tend to be less anxious and more happy than the less curious ones, and also have a greater sense of well-being. When one is curious about a thing or event, they are more engaged with it that they remember it with ease, and helps brain to retain information better. Curious minds result in increased creativity and also stronger interpersonal relationships as well.

In psychoanalysis, childhood is seen as the formative phase in the development of human psyche, the phase where

self-actualization begins and leads to personal growth. In Freudian perspective, curiosity emerges as a biological drive in the anal and phallic stages and is a way of challenging the knowledge and boundaries set by the old generation. But in post-Freudian view, curiosity is not just sexual, but therapeutic tool which helps to understand reality by fostering creativity, learning, communication thereby enabling the child to confront its internal conflicts. The Lacanian Mirror Stage where the child encounters its self for the first time resulting in a sense of alienation and jubilation talks about the 'innate inquisitiveness' that children are associated with. This phase establishes the relationship between the 'self' and the 'other' which is quite symbolic of the emotional balance inherent to human lived

experience, wherein the fragmented self is fortified by a spirit of resilience.

Over the past two decades, things have changed rapidly with the intervention of technology. The fast-paced life and the far-reaching changes have initiated lots of debates and discussions on the ontology of human beings and humanity as a whole. Had the initial concern be about the replacement of humans by machines with loss of jobs, it was proved unfounded; and it required time for the other implications of technology to be fully understood. The alternate world with altered conditions initiated by technology has engulfed not just the physical but the cognitive as well as social skills of humans, especially children. With access to digital technology, the cognitive exposure has expanded but it marked a decline in the qualities that are generally associated with children- the most important ones being curiosity and wonder.

Childhood 2.0 is a documentary directed by Jamin Winans, Kiowa Winans, and Robert Muratore which features interviews with real parents, children, psychologists, doctors, educators and other experts in child and safety development. It explores the issues faced by parents and children in the current world by bringing in people from old and new generations to show how the world was before the introduction of technology and after. The dangers lurking in the web world and its repercussions, mental as well as physical, are brought to the forefront through a series of questions and answers. The unprecedented challenges that children face as they grow up in the digital era present an alarming picture as the concerns raised are universal.

The documentary begins with an ironic statutory warning that it is unsuitable for children; paradoxically, it presents the problems faced by children. The very first question is towards the parents regarding what do they love in their children. As they talk about the qualities they like in their kids, they also share the life they had as children- how they used to stand together as a family- parents, kids, neighbours- even during the time of Great Depression. But now, 'kids had to change so much faster than they did'. The second question was for the children on their opinion about their parents' childhood. The answer from young kids to teenage boys and girls varied from- 'no gadgets', 'they had fun', 'they played outdoor games 24x7', 'they were like 'Charlie' in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*', 'more genuine, authentic and better than ours'. Though the answers were different, it all highlighted one thing" with the explosion of communication and technology in the last twenty years, everything has become difficult and complex in a world that paces so fast. The evolution of communication industry from land phones, caller IDs,

paggers to video calling facilities via various social media platforms, throws a poignant question: how far accountable is the communication industry?

The fundamental aim behind this development in communication and technology was to stay connected and to support each other. Everything that was exciting initially has become scary. Jean Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality is crucial in understanding this digital world that we live in. In his work, *Simulacra and Simulation*, he argues that the representations, the *simulacra*, dominate the modern society where new realities are not only produced but replaced thereby blurring the distinction between the real and unreal. Social media platforms with their algorithms are manifestations of what he names as 'hyperreality'. The lived experiences of the 'real' world is replaced by the filtered, fake online identities and curated images that act like simulations. It is critical to remember that these simulations do not imitate reality, rather it precedes and shapes it. He defines simulacrum as,

it is the reflection of a profound reality;

it masks and denatures a profound reality;

it masks the absence of a profound reality; it has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum. (4)

Curiosity, which once emerged as a result of a child's innate exploration of nature and interpersonal engagement with the people and the surrounding is replaced by digital consumption and algorithm-driven stimulation. As these technologically saturated environments shape their lived experiences, there occurs a paradigm shift epistemologically and ontologically, creating a new subjectivity highly dependent on simulated experiences. This leads to a gradual erosion of the curiosity-driven exploration, and makes one analyse critically how agency, imagination and emotional development are constituted within digitally constructed realms.

Both parents, children and other experts unanimously agree to the physical as well as the mental issues faced by them, especially teenagers. Their brains are wrapped around by technology that they do not know what to be afraid of. According to a recent survey, 53% of kids use mobile phones 24x7. The average time a teenager uses mobile phone is between 8 to 11 hours. The reason for this skyrocketing of the time they use mobile phones are the precision and the algorithm with which various applications and virtual platforms work. A professor in Harvard University has made a very interesting observation on the working of these algorithms. 'Man is a predictable animal'- this is the principle with which gambling and other card games work. Similar is the case with social media platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, Fortnite and others. Children

connect virtually when they are bored as they needn't use their brains online, resulting in a loss of sensory skills, social skills and coping skills. Thus, they connect online to disconnect socially.

Children have become incredible social creatures that they do not want to talk about their problems to anyone. The current rise in mental health issues problems like depression, anxiety, addictions, lack of resilience when confronted with online bullying, increased suicidal rates, issues related to eyes are all the aftermath of this alarming transition of childhood experiences. Another matter of grave concern related to this is 'cloud addiction' which in simple terms can be defined as an affective and cognitive dependence on cloud infrastructures. All the children being interviewed admit how rewarding it is for them to get 'likes and followers' in Instagram. 'They feel good, better when they have more likes and followers, and otherwise they feel horrible. This instant gratification and social rewarding could turn to punishment anytime. The persuasive technology used by most of the online apps where the merit of one person is measure by comparing the likes one get with that of others lead to narcissism, one of the dark triads of personality traits. Thus the attention seeking self always tries to keep a perfect image online. In a world with rapid technological advancement and accelerated lifestyle, the question is: Is there safe place for kids?

Rosi Braidotti in *The Posthuman* presents posthuman childhood as relational, embodied and technologically mediated. Embedded within ecological, social and digital assemblages, the digital devices and virtual platforms with their algorithms act as formative forces, not as external tools, in shaping childhood. A posthuman child is a relational subjectivity which exist within the network of digital relationships techno-mediated interactions. Posthuman childhood becomes part of digital screens, codes and simulations and these digital entanglements decentralise the concept of an autonomous entity. The posthuman child emerges through assemblages where agency is distributed or relational rather than individualized. She further states,

the old modernist idealisation of the unitary, rational, independent, dislocated, objective, able-bodied human subject has been revealed as the fiction that it really is. The self, subject, person, citizen, the human – each of these individualised entities – is now firmly interconnected, tied into and caught up in the ever-growing whirlpool of capital, technology, communication that shift us through real and virtual places and contexts. The twenty-first-century citizen is a

'knowing subject' with the potential to 'free us from the provincialism of the mind, the sectarianism of ideologies, the dishonesty of grandiose posturing and the grip of fear' (11).

The lack of resilience and coping skills in children in the current world throws light into the crimes that happen online. Many kids prefer online because they see it more viable and safer to be bullied online rather than hitting in front of a broader and larger audience. When a study is conducted on 'what gets more response online?', it was revealed that moral outrage gets the more engagement, resulting in an increased rise in online crimes. The neutrality of crimes online, i.e. they do not see each other face to face, make it more convenient and seemingly less consequential. Experts in the field of Child Development cautions parents to be aware of the spectrum in which the kids are in the development cycle. The lack of resilience in today's children show their inability to cop up with failures. It shouldn't be a proper failure, just a trivial thing like being blocked by someone in Instagram or if not tagged in a photo or video or if not invited for an event trigger unlikely emotion of not being liked by others.

An additional matter of critical concern is pornography. When asked about the surge in pornography and other matters related to it, parents and children who belong to two entirely different generation had diverse experiences. While the older generation during their teenage had to content with magazines like Playboy and late-night TV shows, the current generation has access to it 24x7. As physical barriers do not exist, 'sexting' and 'sextortion' have become too common and unsolicited. The teenagers revealed how irrelevant it is to have communication with the opposite person to have sex. The situation is so frightening that kids involved in this are sometimes just 10 years old. Many virtual sites provide platforms for people to meet these young kids. And parents have underestimated the commonality of these issues. Recent surveys have found that more than 8 billion children are abused online globally.

As one explores the reason for the loss of wonder and curiosity among today's children, the hyperreality with its simulacra and simulations emerges as the principal cause. However, on being asked about this, children responded with answers that they perceived the real world as boring and unengaging. As soon as everyone reaches home, everyone go to their rooms and takes out their mobile phones. Now, who should be held accountable for this?

This altered condition of childhood has curtailed sustained attention and wonder compelling one to rethink about the factors and situations that led to the current scenario. The easy blame on technology is invalid here as

technology is great if we can control our consumption of it. If earlier school students were taken to wildlife, forests and planetariums as part of their study tour, now they are being taken to shopping malls. Children often spend more time watching screens than engaging in imaginative play or real-life exploration, which can reduce their interest in discovering new things. The AI-driven images which they can personalise the way they want has reduced the sense of wonder in them. They are no more excited when they find a bird or an animal or anything beautiful in nature.

In *Childhood 2.0*, children's social interactions are often portrayed as mediated experiences conducted through smartphones and social platforms rather than embodied, face-to-face encounters. Validation is measured through likes, comments, and digital attention rather than through direct interpersonal feedback. The documentary suggests that children increasingly depend on digital affirmation for emotional regulation. This aligns with Baudrillard's claim that in a hyperreal society, "the signs of the real" take precedence over genuine lived experience (*Simulacra and Simulation 2*). For contemporary children, digital platforms do not merely reflect social reality but actively constitute it.

While Baudrillard reveals how digital mediation substitutes lived reality with simulation, Rosi Braidotti's concept of the posthuman subject reframes what it means to be a child in the digital age. Braidotti argues that "the posthuman subject is a relational subject constituted in and by multiplicity" (*The Posthuman* 49). In contrast to classical humanist notions of the autonomous individual, the posthuman subject is co-constituted through relations with technologies, nonhuman agents, and networked systems. Subjectivity is not located solely within a bounded self but distributed across assemblages of humans and technologies. The emotional landscapes of the children—aspirations, anxieties, self-esteem—are continuously influenced by digital metrics and algorithmic visibility. This supports Braidotti's claim that subjectivity is distributed across human and nonhuman relations rather than confined within the individual. Thus, the transformation of childhood depicted in *Childhood 2.0* represents not merely a shift in technology use but a broader reconfiguration of subjectivity, sociality, and meaning.

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Politeness and Women Communication Practices in Groups' Dynamics of Anglophone Cameroon Women Associations

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Abstract— This study set out to explore politeness use during interactions in women associations from the South West and North West Regions of Cameroon in order to reveal their functions in groups' dynamics. The study employed a qualitative collective case study design, blended with Brown and Levinson's (1987) Face-Saving Politeness Theory and Bales' (1957; 1999) IPA framework to explore politeness use and its functions in two categories of predominantly women associations, comprising Biwon Self Reliance and Farmers and Traders' Union (BSRFTU), Cameroon Gatsby Foundation (CGF), One Hand Cannot Tie a Bundle (OHCTB)- Development-Based associations, Catholic Women's Association (CWA) and Christian Women Fellowship (CWF)—Faith-Based associations. Through purposeful and random sampling techniques and with unstructured-open-ended interviews, non-participant observation and audio-recordings, 24 events which ranged from 24 minutes to 7 hours were analysed through the latent content analysis. The findings show that in an attempt to mitigate the intensity of the 'face damages' of communicative acts in the realisation of the problem-solving procedure of questions, attempted answers, negative reactions and positive reactions during meeting deliberations, members of BSRFTU, CGF, CWA, CWF and OCTB hedge them with politeness strategies. A total of 6,599 strategies of politeness accompanied thought units during interactions in these women associations. 4,796 of these politeness strategies, that is 72.7% were expressed in faith-based events and 1,803 of them, a percentage of 27.3, were used in development-based events. Of the five super strategies of politeness proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), positive politeness (PP) was the most frequently employed super strategy in the activities of these women associations. It recorded an overall percentage of 70.3; that is 4,641 strategies used, with 3541 strategies (73.8%) used in faith-based associations and 1100 strategies (60%) used in development-based associations. However, while off record politeness was also preferred in development-based associations' events, negative politeness and bald on record were higher in faith-based associations. Don't Do the FTA was very minimal in the two categories of associations. The majority of these politeness strategies accompanied attempted answers thought units- 2,293 strategies, that is 34.7%. 1,942 strategies, that is 29.4% accompanied positive reactions thought units, and 1,410 strategies (21.4%) were used during negative reactions thought units. This use of politeness demonstrates that communication for members of these women groups does not only revolve around discussing issues. It also entails connecting with one another. This use of politeness during group's events in Anglophone Cameroon women associations' interactions reveals significant traits of women's interaction ethics: the use of collaborative and cooperative talk to create and maintain relationships, the avoidance of criticisms or making it gentle if it could not be avoided, the avoidance of outdoing others, or putting others down, and the tendency of paying attention to others and to relationships.



Keyword— *Politeness, Communication Practices, Groups' Dynamics, Anglophone Cameroon, Women Associations*

I. INTRODUCTION

The human personality is a sacred thing; one dare not violate it nor infringe its bounds, while at the same time, the greatest good is in communion with others, (Durkheim, 1915, as cite in Brown and Levinson, 1987).

This declaration by Durkheim is an indication that communing is an integral aspect of human existence, and a smooth flow of this is imperative. This is particularly important to women who have had an extended history of marginalisation and struggle for recognition (Bih, 2014; Fondze, 2012; Kah, 2012, Kassea, 2006; National Institute of Statistics, 2024; Nchi, 2018). It is therefore vital that they appease one another, even in their language use during gatherings.

The desire by women to bond in order to stand against their being dominated and marginalised and to seek for greater social, economic and political involvement in matters of the state and those that concern their welfare, has been existing for centuries. In Britain, for instance, in the year 1777, Abigail Adams, the wife of a member of the Continental Congress, cautioned her husband, John, not to “put such unlimited power in the hands of the husbands”, attesting that “all men would be tyrants if they could,” and that if care and attention is not paid to women, they are “determined to foment a rebellion and will not hold themselves bound by any laws in which they have no voice and representation” (Halsey & Johnson, 1988, p.562).

In line with this, and also in response to the Revolutionary French Declaration of the Rights of Man, a French woman by name Mary Wollstonecraft, in 1792, wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, a book that is considered one of the first major feminist tract, (Yinyui, 2011). This book drew women's attention to the necessity of having a good education, empowering themselves and supporting each other so as to jointly fight for their rights. Many women movements and associations were formed thereon, although most of them were geared towards fighting for women's suffrage.

In Africa, the advent of colonisation encouraged policies which promoted the eradication of female emancipation, thereby reinforcing the prevention of African women's participation in the welfare of her country (Kassea, 2006). This resulted to the abolition of the dual-system of leadership built on the religious beliefs of gods and goddesses that had been in place in most African cultures, prior to colonisation (Kasea, 2006, Kah, 2012). This situation further deteriorated after the acquisition of

independence by most African countries, as men who had always been favoured by the white colonial masters, were once again given the baton of control, with women being at their mercies, forcing women to look for avenues to commune so as to overcome these challenges.

In Cameroon, before the advent of the 21st century, the situation was not different. Women's contribution to development was pushed to care-giving and household activities, with few exceptions from certain cultures such as the Laimbwe's in the North West region, where women, as did their male counterparts, were particularly influential in all domains of life, especially in the socio-economic sector, as evident in the activities of the Elderly Women Society (Kefa'a) and of the Women's Association and Clubs (Zhiamehzele), (Kah, 2012). Also, the economic crisis that hit Cameroon in the 1980s and which still has an effect today, further worsened the situation by bringing more hardship thereby forcing Cameroonian women to the forefront of decision-making in some households and beyond. Ironically, these circumstances increased their freedom to participate in income generating activities in order to careter for themselves and their families. To empower themselves, some of these women formed groups and associations, thereby increasing the range of women groups and associations from being solely religious and traditional female cults to those with developmental purposes. These women associations and groups abound today, serving as vital sanctuaries for economic empowerment, spiritual growth, and social cohesion, although most of them are not officially registered.

In order to navigate a patriarchal society that often marginalizes their voices (Bih, 2014; Kassea, 2006, Kah, 2012, Fondze, 2012), members of these associations have developed unique interactional codes within these groups. While the "what" of these interactions (Speech Acts) and the "how" of their cooperation (Gricean Maxims) have been documented (Ewane et al, 2022, 2025), the specific linguistic and paralinguistic strategies used to manage relationships, reputation, and dignity (Politeness) require distinct analysis, giving that the preservation of one another's face and construction of relationship is paramount to these women in their gatherings. In the context of some selected women associations from the South West and North West regions, specifically, Catholic Women's Association (CWA), Christian Women Fellowship (CWF), Cameroon Gatsby Foundation (CGF), Biwon Self-Reliance Farmers and Traders' Union (BSRFTU) and One Hand Cannot Tie a Bundle (OHCTB), and with the aid of Brown

and Levinson's (1987) Face-Saving Politeness model and Bales' (1957; 1999) Interaction Process Analysis (IPA) Framework, this study diverges from previous studies by exploring the linguistic and paralinguistic strategies that the members of these women associations adopt to show consideration for one another's feeling (Politeness) during groups' dynamics. The study posits that the high frequency of specific conversational rules that prevail in Anglophone Cameroon women's interactions is not merely a reflection of social etiquette, but a strategic tool for "camouflaging" authority (Christie, 2000) and maintaining the delicate balance between task accomplishment (fundraising, loans, spiritual directives) and social cohesion. Brown and Levinson recommend that discovering these principles of language usage may be largely coincident with discovering the principles out of which social relationships, in their interactional aspects are constructed, (1987, p.55). This study aims to demonstrate how this obtains in Anglophone Cameroon women interactions.

1.1 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The present study set out to explore politeness use during interactions in women associations from the South West and North West regions of Cameroon in order to reveal their functions in groups' dynamics of Anglophone Cameroon women.

The objectives guiding the study are:

1. To critically examine politeness' use during interactions in women associations from the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon.
2. To explore the extent to which politeness use function to reveal communication practices and interaction patterns of Anglophone Cameroon women (North West and South West).
3. To reveal the commonalities and differences in politeness use in these women associations.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 On Politeness

One of the works that lends credit to this study is Takam's (2008) study titled 'Do Cameroonian Women always speak a more refined language than men?' With the aid of Brown and Levinson's (2010) face-saving politeness model, Takam examined speech of female Cameroonians and sentences from Calixthe Beyala's novels *Femme nue femme noire* (2003) and *Assèze l'Africaine* (2001) revealing that Cameroonian women are fast becoming impolite. This is evidenced in their use of vulgar language; a notion that is contrary to the well-known assertion that women are more polite than men. Utterances such as "Close your mouth

when you are eating, you ill-bred child" (said by a mother to her son during a social gathering), Va-t-en de là, laid type" (Get out of there, you ugly bloke) said by a young lady to a man she was apparently meeting for the first time, and who was trying to snatch a few minutes' conversation, "Putain! Hurla maman saluad! Fils d' enculé! Ordure! Pourriture! Comment a-t-il osé me faire un coup pariel" ("Bloody hell! mum roars. "Swine! Dickhead's son! Bastard! Louse! How has he got the guts to do this to me?") (Beyala, 2001, as cited in Takam, 2008, p.42); insults poured out by a female character who received a warrant of arrest from a rich man named Awono, her former husband, for the refund of the money he paid for her dowry 13 years earlier, and "Ça vous travaille, hein, bondes d'hypocrites! Vous cachez vos femmes derrière des voiles pour mieux les assujettir! Espèces de vicelords! Assassins! Enculés de donneurs de leçons!" (It's really bothering you, eh? Pack of hypocrites! You veil your wives to better subjugate them! You lechers! Murderers! Fucking sermonizers!) (Beyala, 2003, p. 33-34 as cited in Takam, 2008, p. 77-78). Takam attributes this use of vulgar language by Cameroonian women to the circumstances women find themselves in, given that they are always battling with men and struggling to defend themselves from men who constantly attack them even in public. He thus argues that asserting that women most often speak a more polite and more refined language than men could be misleading if the context and the circumstances in which such language spoken is not taken into consideration. He concludes by asserting that although it is true in relative terms, that women are more polite than men, circumstances abound where women's language could be "powerful, uncooperative, aggressive, uncouth, insulting thereby face threatening," (Takam, 2008, p. 80). He postulates as does Cameron (2005), Christie (2000), Crawford (1995), Holmes (1995), Mills (2003), and Mullany (2002) that it is important to contextualise politeness, and to rethink gender and politeness in its context, taking into account all the possible circumstances that may influence a speech act.

This context-dependent approach to language analysis is in conformity with Holmes' assertion that the relationship between sex, politeness and language is a complex one and that while research shows that overall, women are more polite than men, it also depends on what we mean by 'polite' as well as which women and men are being compared and what setting or community of practice the interaction occurs in, (Holmes, 1995 as cited in Mills, 2003). This context-dependent approach to language analysis is also in conformity with Hawisher and Selfe (2000); Paltidge (2010), Ewane, (2012) and Eric (2014) who also opine that sex differences in politeness use is complex and therefore, vary with context and culture, amongst other factors. How

this assertion applies to groups gatherings of predominantly female faith-based and female development-based association's activities from the Anglophone regions of Cameroon remains one of the main objectives of this study.

In a related study titled 'Politeness strategies in the ghómala-culture and language', Mba (2008) demonstrates how despite the fact that modernism and contact with the western culture seems to have affected the use of politeness in the ghómala culture and language; an indigenous language from the Western Region of Cameroon, specific traditional indicators of politeness remain unchanged. This includes naming strategies, pronouns usage, kinship terminologies, and the use of names in personal address and in family members' call signals. For instance, as a strategy of politeness or intention to be polite, young children in ghómala culture address parents or elderly people using the name of a son or daughter. Expressions like "the father of..." and "the mother of..." are often used to address elderly people, (Mba, 2008, p.155). The study equally reveals that women are usually much more versed in expressing these strategies of politeness when addressing their husbands, their husband's brothers and sisters, their own children, other people's children and even their fellow women of the immediate environment or from far. He attributes this high rate of women's use of more of this conversational strategy to the fact that most often, women not only take the blame for any negative attitude shown by their children in public, but society also expects them to exhibit polite attitudes due to their role as mothers bringing up younger generations.

Mba's (2008) revelation of naming strategies, pronouns' usage, the use of kinship terminologies and address forms as indicators of politeness is significant to this study, which also explores politeness use in interactions. This study therefore aims to verify if naming strategies, pronouns' usage, the use of kinship terminologies and address forms, which are indicators of politeness, and whose uses have been mastered by women in ghómala culture, are features of Anglophone Cameroon women associations interactions.

Another study that lends credit to this work is Anchimbe (2008). Anchimbe investigated the impact of naming strategies in English in Cameroon in an attempt to justify why people's personal names are usually replaced with kinship terms and how that is related to the desire to be polite, to show respect, to be close and to avoid calling names. The study reveals that address terms such as 'brother,' 'sister,' 'uncle,' 'aunt,' 'mother' and 'father', have a broader interpretation within Cameroonian culture than in Britain where the English language originated. He attributes this change to the "collision of western and indigenous culture in post-colonial eras, where these

naming terms have been re-made to either carry the mark of politeness- respect, deference and mitigation which the addressee deserves or the impoliteness- insolence and rudeness that the addressee is made to suffer," (p.111).

The study's findings also reveals that in the Cameroonian culture, as opposed to western cultures where kinship relationship is less important beyond first cousin, the choice of 'brother', 'sister', 'uncle', 'aunt', 'mother' or 'father' is done for reasons such as "closeness, deference, age, name-escapism and politeness," thereby projecting a "feeling of closeness that actually did not exist before," (p.112). Hence, these English kinship terms which do not exist explicitly in many African languages, have now been borrowed into the indigenous cultural interpretations and are re-imposed on English to refer to tribal relations, new acquaintances and older friends. To Anchimbe, because communication and interaction at certain levels, especially that of the family is normally more cordial and less familiar, the use of these close-kinship terms between persons who are not blood relatives creates and even reinforces a cordial family atmosphere, bridging gaps created by 'strangeness' between people who may be meeting for the first time. He therefore proposes as does Meier (1995) that each speech community has means to communicate deference, mitigation, directness and indirectness, and these means must not always find equivalence across languages and cultures. In the exploration of groups' interactions of some selected women associations, the present study seeks to verify if Anglophone Cameroon women also have unique means to communicate deference, mitigation, directness and indirectness. The commonalities and differences in the expression of these conversational rules in the various associations types is also an integral aspect of this study.

In another related study titled "On not calling people by their names: Pragmatic undertones of sociocultural relationships in a postcolony", Anchimbe (2011) contends that because the use of personal names in Cameroon is often considered face-threatening, particularly when addressing elders or individuals of higher status, interlocutors replace them with specific terms. This is contrary to Western Anglo-Saxon pragmatics, where the use of a first name often signals positive politeness and a desire to be liked and to reduce social distance. The study reveals that terms such 'manyi' (Mother of twins), 'tanyi' (father of twins), 'moyo' (in-law, specifically male), 'mbanya' (co-wife in a polygamous marriage), 'mbombo' (namesake) function as "honorifics of achievement" or "relational markers." Hence, being addressed as 'Tanyi' or 'Manyi' elevates the recipient's social status, giving that parenting twins is culturally viewed as a special blessing or burden that commands respect. Similarly, the term 'Mbanya' (co-wife), while potentially a source of rivalry, is used vocatively to

maintain domestic harmony and acknowledgement of a shared destiny, (Anchimbe, 2011, p.1477). According to Anchimbe, these name avoidance serves the pragmatic functions of deferential politeness (acknowledging hierarchy- age and status), social endearment (fostering intimacy without the "rudeness" of using a bare name) and cultural preservation (maintaining indigenous kinship structures even when speaking English or French); all of these highlighting how indigenous cultural norms hybridize with colonial languages to create unique communicative systems. He further asserts that these name-avoidance is not just a temporary form of situational indirectness but rather an important social interactional facet of the Cameroonian community. That, although these norms are unwritten, they are observed by members of the society. He advises that understanding how they function requires in depth analyses, preferably with naturally occurring data, of speakers' verbal and non-verbal interaction in specific settings, in their daily activities. That is the purpose of this work that analyses naturally occurring data from groups' interactions of women associations from the South and North West Regions in order to bring out the politeness strategies that accompany utterances, signs and symbols. The commonalities and differences in the expression of these conversational rules in the various associations types is also an integral aspect of this study.

Echu (2008) examined the contribution of forms of address in rendering communication polite, revealing as did Anchimbe (2008; 2011) that like many other African indigenous languages, kinship terms are used in Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE) not only to express kinship relationships but also to reduce the distance between people who do not even know each other. Thus, the use of address forms such as 'sah', 'massa', 'mista', 'chif', 'madam', 'sita', 'broda', which can be traced from English Language, and 'Ni', 'Mbe', 'Oga', 'Manyi', 'Tanyi', with traces from various indigenous languages, are clearly polite forms of address used in addressing persons who are superior in social status to the speaker, (Echu, 2008, p.124). The study also reveals that whenever a speaker identifies himself or herself culturally with the addressee, there is the tendency of using forms of address like 'Ni', 'Mbe', 'Sango', 'Mola' and 'Amueh' which are culturally marked address forms. On the contrary, when the speaker and addressee share different ethnic identities or when the identity of the addressee is unknown, more loose forms of address that do not identify the addressee's ethnic origin such as 'pah', 'massa', 'chif', are preferred.

The data equally reveals that the use of specific forms of address such as 'amueh', 'asso', 'boh', 'chick', 'complice', 'kombi', 'massa', 'mbanya', 'mbombo', 'sita', 'broda', 'njumba', and 'nkwane', which encourage feelings of

camaraderie, are motivated by factors such as group solidarity, friendship and common interests, Christian denomination or belonging to the same fellowship group, and militants or sympathisers of the same political party. He therefore, asserts as does Anchimbe (2008, 2011) and Mba (2008) that kinship terms do not only bring interactions closer to addressee and speaker in terms of distance, but are also used by interlocutors to express politeness. According to Ewane (2008), a combination of French, Bantu and English words such 'le big', 'on se meet', 'repé', 'remé', 'grand copo', 'le man', 'associé(e)', 'on se see', 'teacher', 'maa'mi', 'laisse-moi, non?' 'Comment non?', 'je back', 'tonton', 'je go (nang)', 'ça-va? Tata', 'forget', 'give moi', 'la mouna', 'assia', 'gracias', "assos"; which make up a cultural hybrid of unique politeness collection from Cameroon, have also become a characteristic feature of the speech style of students in Cameroonian universities (p.57-59). The present study comes in investigating if these specific forms of address and kinship terms which are characteristic features of Cameroonian verbal interactions are used by members of women associations from the South West and North West regions of Cameroon.

Another study that informs the preset study is Chiato and Lando (2021). Chiato and Lando (2021) utilized a qualitative design, drawing data from public conversations to carry out a sociopragmatic analysis of selected menstrual euphemisms that girls and women in Cameroon employ when making reference to menstruation in public conversations. The findings reveal that girls and women in the Anglophone regions use euphemisms to talk about menstruation. To Chiato and Lando, these euphemisms are not merely substitutions but cognitive filters that transform distasteful realities into socially acceptable metaphors. The data reveals that as opposed to Western euphemisms which often focus on "hygiene" or "sanitization" (Sveen, 2016), girls and women's use of euphemism in Cameroon indicate a rich metaphorical diversity classified under 10 semantic domains of visitation, periodicity, royalty, fertility/productivity, friendship, indisposition, discomfort of woman sickness and illness, compensation, obligation/reward, and colour. These terms function primarily as solidarity markers. By using coded language therefore, these girls/women create a community of practice that excludes males and children, thereby protecting the sanctity of the female experience while adhering to public decency laws.

Among the studies on politeness carried out in the school milieu in Cameroon is Ewane (2012). This study, which employed Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness principle to investigate the politeness strategies teachers and students of secondary schools employ during English Language lessons revealed that politeness use during

lessons in English language varies. Whereas much of positive politeness strategies accompany teacher-talk, especially when addressing students, students make use of more of negative and off record politeness strategies. Precisely, when interacting with senior students and teachers, they employ negative and off record politeness strategies. On the contrary, when addressing peers and classmates, more of positive politeness strategies are used. The study also revealed that gestures and signs accompany students' use of linguistics politeness during lessons. In the same line, Eric (2014), who also employed Brown and Levinson (1987) politeness principle to explore the politeness strategies used in print media interviews of English expression in Cameroon by male/female interviewers and interviewees, revealed that the male and female interviewers and interviewees apply politeness strategies in their interviews. However, the men frequently used more politeness strategies than the women in attempt to avoid or minimize threatening their hearer's face; revealing that the men (interviewers and interviewees) are more polite than their female counterpart. This study intends to investigate if this differences in the expression of politeness by male and female interactants obtains in women associations. This is because some of the associations, such as CGF, OHCTB and BSRFTU have male members.

2.2 On Interaction

A lot of studies have been carried out on men and women's interactions. Most of these studies focused on language use in Western cultures, indicating how these mirror gender roles, (Buikema and Smelik, 1995; Cameron, 1997; Goodwin, 1988; Holmes, 1995; Tannen, 1986; Zimmerman and West, 1975). These studies assert that the gender differences found in the linguistic strategies used by women and men reflect their socially unequal positions. That is, in the same manner that there are distinctions of what men and women do in other spheres of life, so too are there distinctions in their use of language thereby presenting two different cultures, that of the man in the one hand and that of the woman on the other. They go further asserting that while most of what men do in language use is to express their superiority, women on their own use language to express unassertiveness. The Ben Sex Role Inventory of 1974, that equated femininity with being weak, shy, soft-spoken and not using harsh language, (Christie, 2000, p. 118) came up propagating these ideas.

The above stereotypes and prescriptive affirmations on women's verbal behaviour were also echoed in works of arts as early as the 1920s. This was re-echoed in Jespersen (1922) who revealed that women have smaller vocabularies, make extensive use of certain adjectives and adverbs, and

more often than men, break-off without finishing their sentences. According to him, this way of using language by women is because "they start talking without having thought what they are going to say," (Jespersen, 1922, as cited in Sunderland, 2006, p. 5). In a similar manner, Trudgill (1972) investigated the use of the variable (-ing) for which there are two pronunciations in the Norwick English. The findings revealed that while the less prestigious form (-in) was used more by men, the more prestigious (-ing) form was used more by women, (Trudgill, 1972 as cited in Sunderland, 2006, p. 9).

Equally, Lakoff (1975) in her proposition of what she calls women's language, re-echoed these stereotypes. She maintains that overtly polite forms such as the constant use of question tags, rising intonation, the avoidance of expletives, the greater use of diminutives and euphemisms, the use of more hedges and mitigating devices and more indirectness, coupled with vocabulary items such as 'adorable,' 'charming,' and 'sweet', render women's language tentative, thereby complementing trivializing terms used on them in most cultures, (Lakoff, 1975, as cited in Sunderland 2006, p. 13). Paltridge (2010) maintains that these tentativeness in women's language use equally works to keep women in their place in society.

One study that has contributed in bringing to lime light issues on men and women conversational strategies is Maltz and Borker (1982). Maltz and Borker examined young children in recreation activities, discerning that while boys' activities, which usually involve fairly large groups of at least nine individuals were competitive, had clear goals and were organised by rules and roles that specify who does what and how to play, girls in their activities tend to play in pairs or in small groups with no pre-set and clear-cut goals, rules and roles. In boys' games, an individual's status depends on standing out, being better, and often dominating other players; cultivating in them specific communicative rules which turn out to be the basic rules of communication that adult men employ. That is, the use of communication to assert ones' self and ideas, the use of talk to achieve something, the use of communication to attract and maintain an audience, and the use of communication to compete with others for the 'talk stage' so that they do not gain more attention than one, (Maltz and Borker, 1982 as cited in Gumperz, 2009, p.18).

They also observed that unlike boys' games, girls' games were not structured externally, and players had to talk among themselves to decide what they were doing and what roles they had. This lack of stipulation for the rules and roles for girls' game, according to Maltz and Borker, enable girls to cooperate and work out problems by talking, thereby cultivating in girls an interest in the process of interaction more than the product; a basic rule of communication that

adult women employ, (p.18). They include: the use of collaborative and cooperative talk to create and maintain relationships, the avoidance of criticisms and outdoing, or putting each other down, paying attention to each other and to relationships, and interpreting and responding to others feelings sensitively, (p.21).

Aries (1976) also revealed that the interpersonal styles individuals display in group interactions do not only represent their entire repertoire of behaviours, but also tend to be the ones selected to meet the social sex-role pressures in the group's situation, (p.4). Aries examined the interaction patterns and discussion contents of two all-male groups, two all-female groups and two mixed groups, ranging in size of 5 to 7 members from an undergraduate population. With the aid of the General Inquirer, she revealed that there exist differences in the characteristics of social interactions for men and women in single sex and even mixed sex groups; differences that reflect the sex role demands of conventional societies. That is to say men and women express different parts of themselves in the content and structure of their groups when interacting with members of the same sex and of the opposite sex. The findings of this study also revealed that during interactions, men both initiate and receive more interactions than women. Aries considered this a microcosm of the larger society in which it is considered appropriate for men to dominate women but not the reverse. To her, sex role pressures in most societies seemed to be operating to lead men to assume this leadership role even in mixed groups. She, therefore concludes that one of the problems that men and women face in the work group is being confined to these traditional-expressive roles. This is in conformity with Strodtbeck and Mann (1956) and Strodtbeck, James and Hawkins (1957) as cited in Mabry (1985) who declared that men emerge as role specialists characterized by task-related behaviour and attempts to assume group leadership, whereas women emerged as affect specialists characterized by yielding, and positive and negative expressive behaviour.

As stated earlier, Aries (1976), Jespersen (1922), Lakoff (1975), Maltz and Borker (1982), Paltridge (2010) and Trudgill (1972) focused on language use in Western cultures, revealing how these mirror gender roles. This study which investigates politeness use in women associations' interactions from the South West and North West regions of Cameroon seeks to find out if these stereotypes and prescriptive affirmations on women's verbal behaviour are reflected in politeness use in women interactions in postcolonial contexts.

A study on interaction that lends credit to this works is Nam, Lyons, Hwang and Kim (2009). They used Bales (1957; 1999) IPA Framework to examine Face-to-face (FTF) and

Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) interactions of mixed and homogenous population, with the aim of exploring the impact of team diversity and communication modes on team interactions. After examining the communication processes and profiles of the participants, they found out that homogeneous teams evidenced greater levels of communication during team-based task than the heterogeneous teams. The homogeneous teams used more showing agreement, giving opinions, and showing tension communication patterns compared to the heterogeneous teams. With reference to groups/teams' communication modes, the FTF interaction was associated with greater levels of communication compared to the CMC interaction. The data also reveals that teams interacting using FTF communication modes evidenced more tension communication patterns characterized by greater positive socio-emotional communication, more attempted answers, more questions, and more frequent negative socio-emotional communications, (p.780). This finding, according to Nam et al, (2009) is consistent with the literature on groups' interactions which suggest that diversity, while a performing enabler in the long-term, may inhibit team processes such as team cohesiveness, (p.783).

Another study with a focus on group interaction that informs this study is Beck (2009). Beck integrated Bales' (1957) IPA framework with Scheerhorn, Geist and Teboul's (1994) communicative episodes in business meetings to examine three different meeting contexts: a breast cancer support group, a non-profit service provider organization and a city commission, in order to examine how meeting activities such as coordination and decision-making are accomplished in group interactions. The findings reveal that task and relational messages are used to accomplish meeting activities, portraying how business, public administration, and health advocacy environments are contextually created. While the city commission meetings focused on showing solidarity/seems friendly, demonstrating the importance of concerted, formal effort in boosting others in their efforts during groups' events, the non-profit meetings, on the other hand, focused on release tension/dramatizes; showing the importance of joking and the informal environment during groups' events.

As indicated above, Beck (2009) and Nam, et al (2009) employed Bales' IPA framework to examine communication strategies in Face-to-face and Computer-Mediated Communication in business meetings and organisations, revealing the communication modes used during meeting deliberations and how they are realised. This study comes in not only to bring out the communication modes (Interaction patterns) realised during meeting deliberations in women gatherings but also the politeness strategies employed to render these

communication modes non-threatening. What their uses reveals about Anglophone women interaction practices is also an integral aspect of this study.

2.3 Context

This study is set in the context of women associations from the Anglophone Regions of Cameroon (South West and North West Regions). These women associations as used in the study are organisation of women with a common purpose and a formal structure, which exhibit the features of group life that typically emerge as a collection of individuals commune to form a group. Hare (1976, as cited in Ewane et al, 2022) proposes that for a collection of individuals to be considered a group, the members of the group should be in interaction with one another, sharing common goals and sets of norms which give direction and limits to their activity. There should also be sets of roles and a network of interpersonal attraction, which serve to differentiate them from other groups. Two categories of women associations were purposefully sampled to provide data for this study. They are development-based associations which comprise Biwon Self Reliance Farmers and Traders' Union (BSRFTU), Cameroon Gatsby Foundation (CGF) and One Hand Cannot Tie a Bundle (OHCTB), and faith-based associations, comprising Catholic Women's Association (CWA) and Christian Women Fellowship (CWF).

Faith-based associations, as used in this study, are groups formed by Christian women in the Catholic and Presbyterian churches, respectively. Their objectives are geared towards helping women exercise their Christian duties through fellowshiping. Development-based associations, on the other hand, are groups and associations of mostly women, which are apolitical and non-religious inclined. Their main objective is geared towards empowering members economically, so that they can meet up with the basic expenses in life. Although these women associations have diverse objectives, their main goals have been to provide members with the opportunities they need to grow economically, spiritually and materially. Charlton (1984, as in Ewane et al, 2022) had noted the importance of these women associations to the wellbeing of women in his assertion that these women associations are significant not just because they facilitate the implementation of development projects, but because they are traditionally a means for women to enhance their influence on societal issues.

2.3.1 The Catholic Women's Association (CWA).

The Catholic Women's Association, or L'Association des Femmes Catholique (L'A.F.C) - its French appellation, is an apolitical, a non-profit making and lay private association of God's faithful of the Catholic Church in

Cameroon, which is governed by canons 321-326 of the Code of Canon Law, (Catholic Women Association, Statutes and Bylaws, 2012, p.1). This association was founded in Buea, on the 4th of May 1963, by Mrs Anna Foncha, the wife of the Prime Minister of the then Southern Cameroons. Today, it is found in all the regions of Cameroon and has branches in Europe and America. It has a membership of over 20,000 women with 1,412 branches, 396 zones, and 109 divisions distributed in 23 dioceses in Cameroon, (Ewane et al, 2022, 2025). While the main language spoken in the CWA is Pidgin, Standard English is the language of interaction at the provincial and national levels of the association.

2.3.2 The Christian Women Fellowship (CWF)

The Christian Women Fellowship, which is a church group based in the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, was created as a result of the activities carried out by the Basel Missionaries who brought Christianity to Cameroon in 1886, (Yinyuy, 2011, as cited in Ewane et al, 2022). The group got its vigour from intensive Bible studies, prayers and songs composed by the women themselves. It was through these gatherings that the concept of "fellowship" with its different appellations of 'Christian Women's Work', 'Women's Group' or 'Ndola Bito' which in Duala means "the love of women", developed among the women, (Yinyuy 2011, as cited in Ewane *et al.*, 2022, p. 70). As is obtained in CWA, so too is it in CWF, as the main language of communication is Pidgin, although Standard English is allowed. However, in areas where members are uneducated, the local languages are the means of interaction during meetings and gatherings, (G. Besong, personal communication, April 16, 2016). The CWF in the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon has a membership of 17,455, in 16 presbyteries, with 287 congregational groups in 64 zones, (Ewane et al, 2022).

2.3.3 One Hand Cannot Tie a Bundle (OHCTB)

One Hand Cannot Tie a Bundle is a Common Initiative Group (CIG). It is composed of 45 members; 42 women and three men, with the men playing the function of patrons. OHCTB is situated in Owe-Muyuka, in Fako Division of the South West Region of Cameroon. This association that started as a 'njangi' group, where members went to work in farms of individual group members on a rotational basis, was founded in 1994. The aim was that if all the members come as a group to work in one member's farm, the surface area of work done will be more than that of an individual who worked alone. With this objective, the association was created and given the name "One Hand Cannot Tie a Bundle", (R. Che, personal communication, October 12, 2015). OHCTB is composed of a merger of women from many indigenous tribes of Cameroon: Bakossi, Bameta,

Bangwa, Bamingi, Bakweri, Barondo, Ewondo, Bayangi and Bamileki. Due to the fact that most of the members are illiterates, and given the composition of the group, Pidgin remains the main language spoken during group activities, (Ewane et al, 2025).

2.3.4 Cameroon Gatsby Foundation (CGF)

Cameroon Gatsby Foundation is an assemblage of groups made up of women, registered under a Charitable Trusts set up and supported financially by the Sainsbury Family Charitable Trust in the UK. Its main mission has been to assist less privileged people, especially women, by giving them loans with low interest rates. Because CGF groups are made up of representatives of associations (the presidents, the secretaries and financial secretaries of each of the member groups), they are coordinated by field coordinators- employed individuals paid by the foundation, (Ewane et al, 2022). These field coordinators help supervise and coordinate the activities of various groups which are under their jurisdiction. Also, because most members of CGF are farmers and business women, Pidgin is the main language spoken during group activities. Three of the foundation's associations: Muyuka, Buea and Bamenda have provided data for this study.

2.3.5 Biwon Self-Reliance Farmers and Traders' Union (BSRFTU)

Biwon Self-Reliance Farmers and Traders' Union is an association of mostly female traders and farmers located in Mankon, Bamenda, in the North West Region of Cameroon. It has 28 members, comprising 6 men and 22 women. This association was created when a group of women observed that it was only by forming an association that financial and material assistance could be obtained from government agencies and non-governmental organisations. The term "biwon", a word from Lamnso; an indigenous language spoken in the North West Region of Cameroon, which means 'because of children', was chosen as the name of the association, (Ewane et al, 2022, p. 70). The name also serves as a reminder to members of the call by nature to every mother to do whatever it takes to bring up a child. Pidgin is also the language of communication during meeting sessions in BSRFTU.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Materials and Methods

This study employed a qualitative collective case study design (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005) to explore politeness use and its functions in groups' dynamics within women associations. This design was selected to allow for a comparative analysis across two distinct organisational frameworks: faith-based associations and development-

based associations. By examining the different realisations and expressions of politeness in the various associations, the study aimed to build a comprehensive understanding of how politeness strategies and face-work are realized and function in communicative practices in predominantly female spaces.

The study was conducted in the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon, the country's two primary Anglophone regions. The target population comprises members of six purposively selected associations, representing a total membership of 30,152 (30,083 females and 69 males).

The random and purposeful sampling techniques were used to select this population- development-based and faith-based women associations from the Anglophone Regions of Cameroon. While the random sampling technique was used to select the towns in these two regions where data was collected, that is Kumba from Meme Division Muyuka, Buea and Limbe from Fako Division, (South West) and Kumbo from Bui Division, Ntambeng, Bamenda, and Mankon from Mezam (North West), the maximum variation and critical case sampling techniques were used to select the faith-based and development-based associations whose groups' activities provided data for the study. Because the maximum variation sampling technique enables the selection of cases "with markedly different forms of the same experience of the same aspects" (Dörnyei, 2011, p.132), it gave us the opportunity to explore the variations and commonalities in politeness use in the two categories of women associations. Furthermore, the critical case sampling technique was used to choose the study's area; the two Anglophone Regions in Cameroon- the North West and South West Regions. This is because the main language of communication in these two regions is English Language and Pidgin. Also, membership in these sampled associations cuts across tribes and regions, as women doing business and living in these localities and those working there are members of these associations.

The data was gathered through non-participant observation, open-ended-unstructured interviews and audio recording. 24 groups' events were purposefully selected for analysis. Because we were dealing with transcripts which involved the identification and counting of instances of politeness strategies' use in the context of women associations' gatherings, we employed the latent content analysis to analyse the data. This is because we did not only focus on identifying the various politeness strategies, also, the resulting communicative practices and the interaction patterns created in the process of using this conversational rule were equally considered. The data passed through the following latent content process:

- (i) Transcribing the data
- (ii) Pre-coding and coding,
- (iii) Growing ideas and interpreting the data
- (iv) Relating the data to theories and conclusions

Firstly, with the help of Dr Mbonwuh Hans Fonka, a linguist specialised in Cameroon Pidgin, of the Department of English, of the University of Bamenda, the recorded audios were listened to and transformed into textual forms through broad-based transcriptions. This is because most of these women interacted more using Pidgin. Secondly, the linguistic and paralinguistic tactics employed by meeting members to mitigate the face-damage of these utterances and communicative acts were identified using Brown and Levinson's 1987 face-saving politeness model. Also,

written documents and pictures of these meetings were reviewed and studied, and the strategies of politeness used in their expression were identified still with the use of Brown and Levinson's (1987) face-saving politeness model. Thirdly, tables were created thereafter, with these utterances, signs and gestures which were expressed with politeness strategies during each of the meetings. Fourthly, the variations and similarities in politeness use were classified and documented in line with the association types. Lastly, the interaction roles of these communicative acts expressed with politeness strategies were assigned using of Bales' (1957, 1999) IPA Framework. Tables 1, 2 and 3 present these sampled associations, their composition, observed meetings, and their durations.

Table 1: Association Categories and Membership

S/N	Category	Association Type	Total Number of Members	Female	Male
1	Faith-Based Associations	CWA, Ecclesiastical Province of Bamenda	11,744	11,744	0
		CWF, South West	7,455	7,455	0
		CWF, North West	10,000	10,000	0
2	Development-Based Associations	One Hand Cannot Tie a Bundle (OHCTB)	45	41	4
		Cameroon Gatsby Foundation (CGF) North West Sector	413	375	38
		Cameroon Gatsby Foundation (CGF) Fako Sector	467	446	21
		Biwon Self Reliance Farmers and Traders' Union	28	22	6
Total	2	6	30,152	30,083	69

Table 1 displays the various associations and their membership, the population of this study. All the six associations are based in the Anglophone Region of Cameroon. Membership in these sampled associations, especially those of CWF, CWA, CGF and OHCTB cut across tribes and regions. This is because women doing business and living in these localities and those working there are members of these associations.

As table 1 shows, a total number of 30,152 members made up the population of this study. 30,083 of them are females and 69 of them are males. Of this total number, 11,744 are from CWA Our Lady of Grace, Ecclesiastical Province of Bamenda. CWA Our Lady of Grace, Ecclesiastical Province of Bamenda comprises all the members of CWA of the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon. CWF South West has a total population of 7,455 members and CWF North West has a population of 10,000 members. For development-based associations, OHCTB has a

membership of 45, with four of them being males and 41 females. BSRFTU has 28 members; 22 females and 6 males. For Cameroon Gatsby Foundation groups, CGF Fako Sector has a total population of 467 members. 21 of them are males and 446 of them are females. Lastly, CGF North West has 413 members with 38 of them being males and 375 being females. Table 2 presents the total number of events sampled for analysis for each of these associations

As tables 2 and indicate, meetings, rallies, congresses and retreats organised in 6 associations from the South West and North West Regions of Cameroon were observed and recorded. 24 out of about 60 observed events were purposively selected to provide data for this study, giving a total percentage of 40%. The duration of these sampled events is 58 hours, 17 minutes, 5 seconds. These ranged from 24 minutes to 7 hours. Details of these recorded events and their codes have been presented in table 3.

Table 2: Association Categories and Number of Events

<i>No</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Association Type</i>	<i>Number of Events</i>
1	Faith-Based Associations	Catholic Women Association (CWA)	06
		Christian Women Fellowship (CWF)	06
2	Development-Based Associations	One Hand Cannot Tie a Bundle	03
		Cameroon Gatsby Foundation, North West Sector	03
		Cameroon Gatsby Foundation, Fako Sector	03
		Biwon Self Reliance Farmers and Traders' Union	03
Total	2	6	24

Table 3: Observed Events

No	Association type and Code		Observed Meeting	Venue	Date	Time	Duration	Participants
1	CWA	CWA SW02	Enlarged General Assembly, CWA, Our Lady of Guadalupe, Diocese of Buea	St John of God Parish, Kumba Town	09/07/2016	11:13	2:20:10	Delegated National executive members, provincial, diocesan, divisional, and zonal executive members
		CWA SW01	Enlarged Provincial Meeting, CWA Our Lady of Divine Grace, Bamenda Ecclesiastical Province	St Anthony’s Parish Kumba-Mbeng, Kumba	01/04/2017	10:50	04:15:01	Delegated National executive member, provincial, diocesan, divisional, and zonal executive members
		CWA NW01	End of Year Congress and 50 th Anniversary Celebration, CWA Gate of Heaven Division, Arch Diocese of Bamenda	St. Theresa’s Parish Azire, Mankon	18/10/2014	08:00	06:11:50	Delegated diocesan executive members, divisional, zonal, and branch executive members
		CWA NW02	Zonal Executive Meeting, CWA Mirror of Justice Zone, Arch	St Martin de Porres Parish, Bambili	12/07/2017	16:03	02:36:21	Executive members of the zone and branches

			Diocese of Bamenda					
		CWA SW03	Branch Meeting, CWA Queen of Peace Muea, Diocese of Buea	St Andrew's Parish, Muea	27/03/2017	16:22	01:15:14	All members of the branch
		CWA NW03	Branch Meeting, CWA Ark of the Covenant branch, Ntambeng, Arch Diocese of Bamenda	St Bernadette's Parish, Ntambeng	23/05/2017	16:15	01:44:19	All members of the branch
2	CWF	CWF NW01	CWF/CMF Retreat and Leadership Course, Bui Division	PCHS Kumbo	03/08/2015	09:45	07:29:10	Executive members of CWF and CMF of zones, and branches, Bui Division
		CWF NW02	CWF Executive Meeting, Bui Presbytery	PCHS Kumbo Bui	04/08/2015	10:00	03:30:39	CWF executive members of zones, and branches of the presbytery,
		CWF NW03	CWF Group Meeting	Nitob I Parish, Mankon	22/05/2017	16:15	02:17:09	All members of the group
		CWF NW04	CWF/CMF Parish Retreat	Alachou Parish, Alachou	15/05/2017	16:12	01:00:50	All members of CWF and CMF in Alachou Parish.
		CWF SW01	Limbe Central Zonal Rally/Come-together	Bota Middle Farms, Fako-South Presbytery	14/05/2017	8:00	07:01:16	All members of the zone
		CWF SW02	Branch Meeting	New Town, Fako South Presbytery	28/03/2017	16:02	01:51:24	All members of the branch
3	CGF	CGF NW01	Sector Meeting, North West	Community Development, North West	03/08/2017	17:00	00:58:03	
		CGF NW02	Sector Meeting, North West	Community Development, North West	07/09/2017	16:30	01:06:45	Delegated executive members of member groups
		CGF NW03	Sector Meeting, North West	Community Development, North West	05/10/2017	15:56	01:15:20	Delegated executive members of member groups

		CGF SW01	Sector Meeting, Muyuka, South West	Government Practicing School, Muyuka	04/04/2016	10:00	01:52:02	Delegated executive members of member groups
		CGF SW02	Sector Meeting, Buea, South West	Muea	28/11/2016	16:15	02:18:41	Delegated executive members of member groups
		CGF SW03	Sector Meeting, Buea, South West	Muea	27/02/2017	16:03	01:59:01	Delegated executive members of member groups
4	BSRFTU	BSRFTU 01	Meeting Session	Commercial Avenue, Bamenda	08/07/2017	16:15	01:15:34	All members
		BSRFTU 02	Meeting Session	Commercial Avenue, Bamenda	05/08/2017	16:45	00:30:15	All members
		BSRFTU 03	Meeting Session	Commercial Avenue, Bamenda	15/07/2017	17:30	00:24:09	All members
5	OHCTB	OHCTB 01	Meeting Session	Owe, Muyuka	11/12/2016	14:45	01:27:12	All members
		OHCTB 02	Meeting Session	Owe, Muyuka	18/12/2016	15:15	01:40:23	All members
		OHCTB 03	Born-House Celebration	Owe, Muyuka	8/01/2017	14:01	02:41:15	All members

3.2 Theoretical Framework

Radcliffe-Brown (1952, as cited in Brown and Levinson, 1987, p. 239) asserts that the “whole maintenance of a social order depends upon the appropriate kind and degree of respect being shown towards certain persons, things, ideas and symbols”. This principle also obtains in women gatherings where utterances, instruments and signs: symbols and gestures function to convey this respect. Because the nature of social relationship between persons is also intrinsically related to the kind and quality of the interaction that takes place between them (Brown and Levinson, 1987), understanding human beings' interactions entail the use of an integrative approach where instruments and signs: gestures, colours and symbol, which usually accompany utterances' use in most women gatherings are assigned meanings and functions. In the exploration of women communication practices in groups' dynamics of Anglophone Cameroon women's associations, Brown and Levinson's (1987) Face-saving politeness model have been

blended with Bale's (1957; 1999) Interaction Process Analysis (IPA) framework. While Bale's (1957; 1999) IPA framework has been employed to assign interaction functions to communicative acts expressed during meetings, rallies and seminars, Brown and Levinson's (1987) Face-saving politeness model has been used to label roles to linguistic and paralinguistic means that the members of these associations employ to show consideration to each other's feelings.

3.2.1 Politeness and Face-Work

As a domain in pragmatics, politeness has attracted much research. This is much so due to its influence in the smooth flow of interaction; making it one of the most studied pragmatics ingredients and therefore with varied definitions. In this study, therefore, the term politeness is used to refers to the linguistic and paralinguistic strategies which interlocutors adopt to show consideration for each other's feeling during an interaction. Before delving into the

discussion of Brown and Levinson's (1987; 2010) face-saving politeness theory, the framework that has been selected to describe the considerations shown by meeting members to each other's feelings during events, it is vital to give a highlight on one or two authors in politeness, given that it is one of the most widely explored pragmatic ingredients.

One of the earliest studies in the area of politeness has been Lakoff's (1973) study in which she discussed the Logic of Politeness. In this work, Lakoff prescribes behaviours she termed politeness maxims, which are "don't impose, give options and make your hearer feel good" (Lakoff, 1973 as cited in Paltridge, 2010, p.72). To Lakoff therefore, to be polite means saying the socially correct thing.

Rather than focusing on 'face needs' as did Brown and Levinson, Leech (1989) perceives politeness as a principle involving "trade-offs" with Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle which according to him "cannot explain why people are often so indirect in conveying what they mean," (p.80). He goes further affirming that human beings most often do flout Grice's Cooperative Principle's maxims of Quantity, Quality, Manner and Relation in order to uphold the politeness principle which he states thus:

Minimize (all things being equal) the expression of impolite beliefs; Maximize (all things being equal) the expression of polite beliefs, (Leech, 1989, p. 81).

The Tact Maxim, Generosity Maxim, Approbation Maxim, Modesty Maxim, Agreement Maxim and Sympathy Maxim, which are manifested in the content of conversation, as well as in the way conversation is managed and structured by its participants, have been attached to this principle. Hence, conversational behaviour such as speaking at the wrong time (interrupting) or being silent at the wrong time has impolite implications, according to Leech.

Brown and Levinson's Face-Saving Politeness Framework

As already indicated, Lakoff (1973) and Leech (1989) approached politeness from the angle of principles and maxims. However, Brown and Levinson in their 1987 framework consider politeness as strategies used during interactions to safeguard interlocutors' face needs. Brown and Levinson in this theory postulate that during interactions, certain illocutionary acts face threaten or damage interlocutor's face. In order to reduce the intensity of these 'face damages' to either the speaker or the hearer,

interlocutors employ certain moves (politeness strategies), the choice of which are made on the basis of the speaker's assessment of D (Social Distance), P (Absolute Power) and R (Rating of the Imposition), (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p.16). These three variables of power, social distance and rating of imposition determine the level of politeness "the weightiness (W_x) of an FTA" with which other things being equal, an FTA will be evaluated, (p.76). Its formula is as follows:

$$W_x = D(S, H) + P(H, S) + R_x$$

Where:

W_x = the seriousness of an FTA (the degree of politeness of a communicative act)

D(H, S) = the value that measures the social distance between H and S

P(H, S) = the value that measures the power that H has over S

R_x = the value that measures the degree to which the communicative act x is rated an imposition in that culture, (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p.76).

Brown and Levinson's notion of 'face' "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself," and "something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction" (p. 61), is derived from Goffman's (1967) work on face and from the English 'folk' notion of face, which ties up with the impression of "being embarrassed, humiliated, or losing face," (Goffman, 1967 as cited in Paltridge, 2010, p. 72). 'Face' according to Brown and Levinson therefore, "is the basic wants, which every member knows every other member desires, and which in general, is the interest of every member to partially satisfy," (p.61). It consists of two related aspects: negative face and positive face. While negative face is the want of every 'competent adult member' that his action be unimpeded by others: the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distractions, which include freedom of actions and freedom from imposition, positive face on the other hand, is the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others. That is, the positive consistent self-image or 'personality'; crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of, claimed by interactants.

Some of these wants are acts which intrinsically threaten face (FTA) and are thus expressed through linguistic and paralinguistic strategies such as asking questions, giving opinion, stating facts, appreciating one another, praising, greeting, advising and expressing disapproval. Brown and Levinson assert that in the context of the mutual vulnerability of either of this face (negative or positive), any

rational agent will seek to avoid these face-threats and will thereby employ certain strategies to minimise threats. In doing this, he will take into account the relative weighting of (at least) three wants: (i) The want to communicate the content of the FTA x , (ii) the want to be efficient or urgent

and (iii) the want to maintain H's face to any degree. And, unless (ii) is greater than (iii), the speaker will minimize the threat of the FTA through the use of the following possible super strategies schematised in Figure 1 below

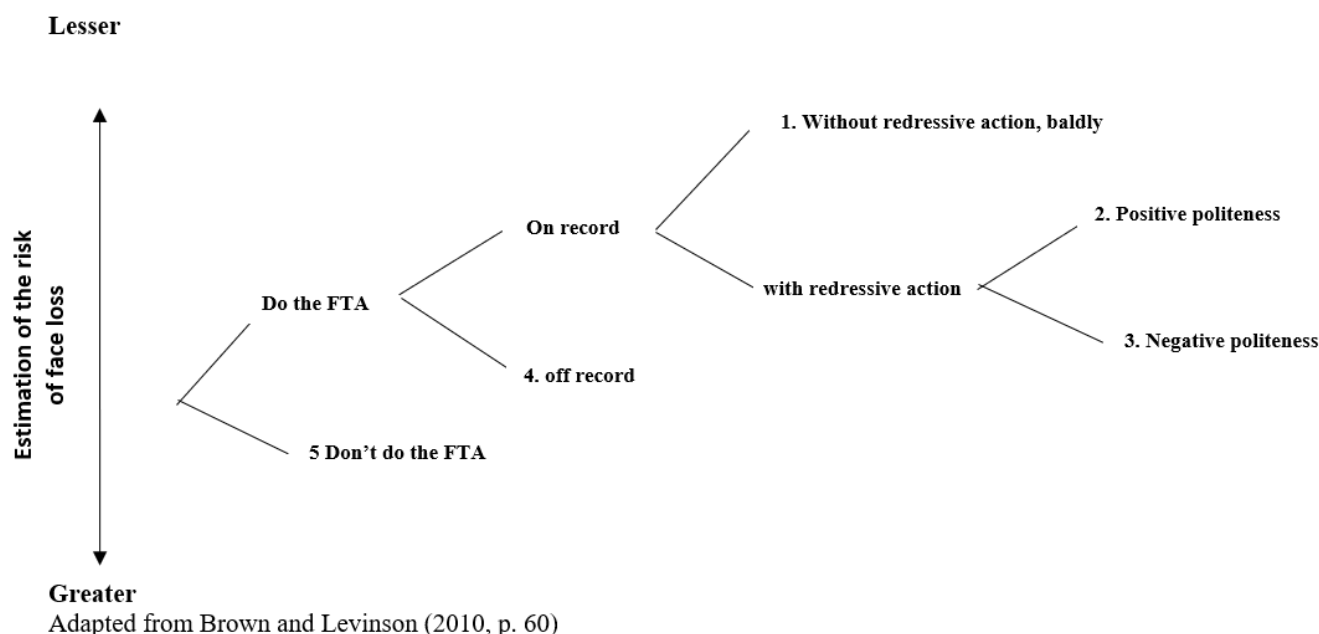


Fig.1: Circumstances determining choice of Strategy

As Figure 1 displays, if an actor cannot avoid doing the FTA, he/she has two choices: doing it on record or doing it off record. An actor therefore uses an on-record strategy if it is clear to him/her and the addressee what communicative intention led to the use of the FTA. He/she can use the on-record politeness strategy 1 (doing an act without redressive action, baldly) if the risk of face loss is lesser. This involves speaking in the most direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way possible, in conformity with Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle's maxims of quality, quantity, manner and relation. According to Brown and Levinson, this happens in situations where there is low distance, high or low power and low rating of the imposition. For instance, during the Zonal meeting of CWA Mirror of Justice Zone, Bambili, Arch-Diocese of Bamenda, the Vice president uses a bald on record politeness strategy to announce report reading. The announcement- *Reading of reports* is done without redressive actions. Giving her position as the vice president (high power) and an elderly member of the association (high social distance), and giving the fact that it is a routing exercise for reports to be presented in zonal meetings, (low imposition), she uses this bald on record politeness strategy.

On the contrary, the use of redressive action (that is to say action that gives face to the addressee) "that attempts to

counteract the potential face damage of the FTA, by doing so in such a way, or with such modifications or additions, that indicates clearly that no such face threat is intended or desired, and that S in general recognises H's face wants and himself wants them to be achieved" (p. 70), gives room to two super strategies: 2-Positive Politeness and 3-Negative Politeness. According to Brown and Levinson, an FTA will be done in any of these two ways only if the speaker does not fear retribution from the addressee, especially in such circumstances where:

- (a) S and H both tacitly agree that the relevance of face demands may be suspended in the interest of urgency or efficiency;
- (b) where the danger to H's face is very small, as in offers, requests, suggestions that are clearly in H's interest and do not require great sacrifices of S; and
- (c) where S is vastly superior in power to H, or can enlist audience superior to destroy H's face without losing his own, (p. 69).

As portrayed in Figure 1, such redressive actions take one or two of the following forms depending on what aspect of face (negative or positive) is being redressed.

Positive Politeness (doing an FTA with redressive action No.2) as illustrated in figure 1, is oriented towards the

positive face of the hearer or addressee, anointing his/her face by "indicating that in some respect, S wants H's wants", (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p.70). According to Brown and Levinson, the potential face threat of an act is minimised in the use of this strategy of politeness by the assurance that in general, the speaker wants at least some of hearer's wants. That is, he/she considers the addressee/hearer to be in important respects the same as him/her, with in-group rights and duties and expectations of reciprocity, or by the implication that speaker likes addressee so that the FTA doesn't mean a negative evaluation of addressee's face. 15 ways which are also motivated by three intentions, are the means through which this approach-based intent could be expressed.

The first intention is the desire of the speaker to claim common ground with the hearer. This gives rise to 8 sub-strategies: 1- Notice, attend to H (his interests, wants, needs, goods), 2- Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy) with H, 3- Intensify interest to H, 4- Use in-group identity markers, 5- Seek agreement, 6- Avoid disagreement, 7- Presuppose/raise/assert common ground, and 8-Joke.

The second intention is the attempt by the speaker to convey that speaker and hearer are co-operators. This gives rise to 6 sub strategies. They are sub-strategy 9- Assert or presuppose S's knowledge of and concern for H's wants, sub-strategy 10- Offer, promise, sub-strategy 11- Be optimistic, sub-strategy 12- Include both S and H in the activity, sub-strategy 13- Give (or ask for) reasons, and sub-strategy 14- Assume or assert reciprocity.

The last intention is the desire of the speaker to fulfil hearer's want (for some X). This gives rise to the last strategy, sub-strategy 15- Give gift to H (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation). This sub-strategy was one of the most commonly used by meeting members. During events, members were appreciated with praises, gifts, claps and even ululations.

As indicated earlier, the other redressive action strategy of face redress is negative politeness (on record action with redress 2). According to Brown and Levinson (1987), this strategy is the 'heart of respect behaviour,' which is oriented mainly towards partially satisfying (redressing) addressee's negative face, "his basic want to maintain claim of territory and self-determination ... and to have his freedom of action unhindered and attention unimpeded," (p.70). This super strategy of politeness is essentially avoidance-based, and realisations of it consist in assurances that the speaker recognises and respects the addressee's negative-face wants and will not (or will only minimally) interfere with addressee's freedom of action. It is characterised by self-effacement, formality and restraint, with attention to very restricted aspects of addressee's self-image, centring on

his/her want to be unimpeded. FTAs are redressed with apologies for interfering or transgressing, with linguistic and non-linguistic deference, with hedges on the illocutionary force of the act, with impersonalising mechanisms (such as passives) that distances speaker and hearer from the act, and with other softening mechanisms that gives the addressee an 'out', a face-saving line of escape, permitting him/her to feel that his/her response is not coerced.

Brown and Levinson state that five major intents motivate the use of any of the negative politeness' sub strategies. The first one, which is titled 'Be direct' is an intuition driving urge that "sometimes directs us to minimize the imposition by coming rapidly to the point, avoiding the further imposition of prolixity and obscurity", (p.130). It gives rise to sub-strategy 1- Be conventionally indirect.

The second intention is 'Don't presume/assume'. According to Brown and Levinson, with this intention in mind, the speaker carefully avoids presuming or assuming that anything involved in the FTA is desired or believed by the addressee. This leads to the use of certain strategies of communication which show avoidance of presumptions about addressee and his wants; what is relevant or interesting or worthy of his attention, thereby keeping ritual distance from him/her. It gives rise to sub-strategy 2- Question, hedge.

The third major way of redressing hearer's negative face is 'Don't coerce H'. This approach is used when the proposed FTA involves predicating an act of hearer, for example, when requesting his/her aid or offering him/her something which requires his/her acceptance. Brown and Levinson further assert that for such FTAs, negative redress may therefore be made by avoiding coercing hearer's response. This may be done by explicitly giving addressee the option not to do a certain act. Five strategies are used to accomplish this intention. They include sub-strategy 1- Be conventionally indirect, sub-strategy 2- Question, hedge, sub-strategy 3- Be pessimistic, sub-strategy 4- Minimize the imposition, Rx, and sub-strategy 5- Give deference.

The fourth motivation that leads to the redress of a listener's negative face is "communicate S's want to not impinge on H," (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p. 187). This tactic represents an intention of the speaker to partially satisfy H's negative-face demands, thus indicating that S is aware of them and is taking them into account in his/her decision to communicate the FTA. Four strategies are used in realising this intent. They are sub-strategy 6- Apologise, sub-strategy 7- Impersonalise S and H: Avoid the pronoun 'I' and 'you', sub-strategy 8- State the FTA as a general rule and sub-strategy 9- Nominalise.

The last and fifth intention is 'Redress other wants of H's derivatives from negative face', (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p. 209). This consists in the offering of partial compensation for the face threat of the FTA, giving rise to two outputs, output 5- Give deference and output 10- Go on record as incurring a debt, or as not incurring H. For instance, to avoid being asked to wait for the meetings' closing time of 6pm, a member of Biwon Self-Reliance Farmers and Traders' Union (BSRFTU) uses an NP2 strategy, hedging her request to leave before the meeting's closing time with *Abeg wuna fit eskius mi? Ai neva rimuv tins dem fo teibl* (Please, can you permit leave? I have not packed my things). She is hedging her request with the word *abeg* (please), and the phrase *wuna fit eskius mi* (can you permit me). Although she is not an executive member (low power and low social distance), She intends leaving when deliberations are still going on in the meeting (high imposition).

As figure 1 illustrates above, the fourth way of doing an FTA is to do it off record. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), an interactant does an FTA off record if the risk of face loss is greater, indicating that there is more than one unambiguously attributable intention, so that the speaker cannot be held to have committed himself to a particular intention. In other words, he/she makes use of all kinds of hints as to what he/she wants or means to communicate, without doing so directly, so that the meaning of the utterance is to some extent negotiable. These off-record strategies are therefore utterances which are essentially indirect uses of language, where speaker says something that is either more general or contains less information, flouting Grice's (1975) maxims of quantity, manner, relation and quality. Linguistic realisations of this super strategy of politeness include metaphors and ironies, rhetorical questions, understatements, tautologies, and all kinds of hints as to what the speaker wants or means to communicate, without doing so directly.

Two major intents: the desire to invite conversational implicatures and the desire to be vague or ambiguous, motivate a speaker to select any of the 15 off-record politeness tactics. If the speaker chooses the first intention, (the desire to invite a conversational implicature) he/she chooses to do the FTA indirectly, giving the hearer some hints which he/she uses to interpret what the speaker really means or intends to say. In doing this, the speaker violates three of Grice's Maxims- that of relation, that of quantity and that of quality. In violating any of these maxims, the hearer is left to ask himself/herself "why did S say that that way?", (Brown and Levinson 1987, p. 213). To invite these conversational implicatures from the hearer therefore, the speaker can give hints (sub-strategy 1), can give association clues (sub-strategy 2), presupposes (sub-strategy 3),

understates (sub-strategy 4), overstates (sub-strategy 5), uses tautologies (sub-strategy 6), uses contradictions (sub-strategy 7), becomes ironic (sub-strategy 8), uses metaphors (sub-strategy 9), and uses rhetorical questions (sub-strategy 10).

The second major intension that motivates a speaker to use any of the off-record tactics is the desire to be vague or unambiguous. Brown and Levinson assert that in doing this, the speaker violates Grice's maxim of manner "Be perspicuous; avoid ambiguity and obscurity" (p. 95). In violating this maxim, the speaker, rather than inviting a particular implicature, will be vague or unambiguous in such a way that his communicated goal remains ill-defined. This, therefore, leads to sub-strategy 11- Be unambiguous, sub-strategy 12- Be vague, sub-strategy 13- Over-generalise, sub-strategy 14- Displace H, and sub-strategy 15- Be incomplete, use ellipsis. For instance, after appreciating members for their financial commitment and sacrifices with references to the affairs of the association, the financial secretary of CWF Mezam Presbytery uses an ORP4 strategy- Understate and an ORP12 strategy- Be vague: *Except fo som fyu membas whe dem don disaid sei God hi wok no get tu go ahead*, (Except for some few members who have decided to disturb God's work), to chastise members who are not financially committed to the affair of the association, flouting the maxims of quantity and manner.

The fifth major way of safeguarding interlocutors' face as illustrated on Figure 1 is 'Don't do the FTA' (DDFTA). Brown and Levinson in their analysis do not give a broad description of this last politeness super strategy. However, they hypothesise that 'Don't do the FTA' is another avoidance-based communicative strategy in which the speaker decides to maintain silent when he/she is expected to comment on an issue. They further posit that this usually takes place when the speaker wants to desist from hurting the addressee, because he/she envisages that his utterance will further spark a confrontation, thereby hurting either the positive or the negative face of the addressee.

It is obvious that women as do other human beings are endowed with Brown and Levinson's proposed 'face wants': the want to be unimpeded on (negative face) and the want to be approved of in certain aspects (positive face). Some of these wants are acts which intrinsically threaten each other's face, expressed through linguistic and paralinguistic strategies such as asking questions, giving opinion, stating facts, appreciating one another, praising, greeting, complaining about things, scolding one another, criticising and advising others. In carrying out these acts, members of these predominantly female associations run the risks of infringing on one other's face. In order to avoid

these risks of face loss and to render their communicative intention acceptable, they jointly cooperate to maintain face; making sure at all cost, to not infringe on each other's face needs employing any of the above proposed strategies of politeness outlined above.

The choice of Brown and Levinson's (1987) 'face-saving' politeness framework as the model used in assigning functions and meaning to women associations' group members strategies of face needs' consideration was motivated by the following reasons:

First, the theory posits that because interaction always attracts aggression (face threatening acts); human beings strive to look for ways to disarm these aggressions through amicable use of language (politeness). This view about politeness has practical implication for this study given that women who have had a long history of marginalisation and maltreatment, and who will likely be sensitive to such behaviours, especially from peers, will most likely expect a disarm of such aggressive tendencies with the use of politeness strategies, when being addressed and when addressing fellow members.

Second, because the main objective of this study has been to identify those specific communication practices in groups' interactions of women associations, the sub strategies or tactics of politeness proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) will provide a useful framework to quantify women's tactics of face redress as they commune. This is because politeness as a pragmatic act provides us with a clear notion of how communication can be made accessible, given that it is mainly made up of attempts intended to maintain the smooth flow of communication and the 'save-facing' of interlocutors. This is in line with Leech's (1989) assertion that politeness maintains the social equilibrium and the friendly relations which enable interlocutors to assume that they are cooperative, (p.82). The data gathered from observed associations' events have illustrated this.

3.2.2. Bales' Interaction Process Analysis (IPA) Framework

As stated earlier, this study has blended Bales' (1957; 1999) IPA framework with Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness model to assign communication functions to utterances, signs and gestures used during associations' events of Anglophone Cameroon women groups. According to Bales, in order to make meaning out of behaviours and the conditions in which they take place, these behaviours have to be broken down to component parts known as single acts of communication or expressions. While these acts function separately as single communicative intentions, they can equally be grouped under headings with reference to their communicative

function in group dynamics, into what is termed the problem-solving process or procedure of Question, Attempted Answer, Negative Reaction and Positive Reactions. Bales further hypothesise that this problem-solving process usually commences with Questions, which are followed by Attempted Answers, then Negative Reactions, and lastly, Positive Reactions, "visualised as a system of interaction in time and between members" (1957, as cited in Ewane *et al.*, 2022 p. 73). Questions, according to Bales are a group of behaviours employed by speakers in demanding for orientation, opinion, suggestions and inquiries during discussions in meetings. They function to elicit response from the addressee, thereby giving a push to the smooth flow of interaction during groups' discussions. Attempted answers are suggestions, opinions and orientations- behaviours that function to provide answers so as to clear doubt and questions raised during interactions. Furthermore, negative reactions are behaviours that express disagreement, anxiety, fear and antagonism. They are utterances and communicative acts which represent actors' dislikes and constraints during group discussions. Lastly, positive reactions are communicative acts of expression of solidarity, satisfaction, agreement and camaraderie by members during group discussions, (Bales 1957, as cited in Ewane *et al.*, 2022).

In an attempt to mitigate the intensity of the 'face damages' of communicative acts in the realisation of the above problem-solving procedure of Questions, Attempted Answers, Negative Reactions and Positive Reactions during meeting deliberations, members of BSRFTU, CGF, CWA, CWF and OCTB hedge them with politeness strategies. The sections that follow present these communicative acts and the strategies of politeness employed to mitigate their face-threats during seminars, meetings, rallies and conferences organised in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

Durkheim (1915) theorised that the human personality is a sacred thing, that one dare not violate it nor infringe its bounds, and that at the same time, the greatest good is in communion with others, (Durkheim, 1915, as cited in Brown and Levinson, 1987, p.1). As the result of the use of politeness in the groups observed and recorded indicates, women seem to have internalised this principle in their language use given that they strive to appease one another by mitigating and hedging their communicative acts. In order to reduce the face-threats of their communicative acts and to appease one another therefore, they make use of various strategies of politeness. This is probably because

they have had an extended history of marginalisation and struggle for recognition, (Bih, 2014; Halsey and Johnson, 1988; Kassea, 2006; Kah, 2012; Nzung, 2011). The sections below illustrate this.

4.1 Politeness and Communication Practices in groups' interaction of Anglophone Cameroon women associations

In an attempt to render their intentions and communicative acts non-face threatening, members of women associations from the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon mitigated them with different politeness strategies. The data reveals that all of Brown and Levinson's (1987) proposed super-strategies of politeness were used during events organised by these women associations, though in different magnitude. This result of the use of politeness during events organised by members of CWA, CWF, CGF, BSRFTU and OHCTB reveals significant traits of women's interaction ethics, which are: the use of collaborative and cooperative talk to create and maintain relationships, the avoidance of criticisms or making it gentle if it could not be avoided, the avoidance of outdoing others, or putting others down, and

the tendency of paying attention to others and to relationships.

A total of 6,599 strategies of politeness accompanied thought units during interactions in selected women associations from the Anglophone Regions of Cameroon. 4,796 of these strategies, that is 72.7% were used in faith-based events and 1,803 of them, a percentage of 27.3, were used in development-based events. The results reveal a trend of use of these politeness strategies as far as Bales problem-solving sequence is concerned. The majority of these politeness strategies accompanied attempted answers thought units- 2,293 strategies, that is 34.7%. 1,942 strategies, that is 29.4% accompanied positive reactions thought units, and 1,410 strategies (21.4%) were used during negative reactions thought units. Lastly, Questions thought units were expressed with 954 politeness strategies. That is 14.5%. Figure 2, figure 3, tables 4 and 5 illustrate these frequencies of use of the five super strategies of politeness in the 24 meetings in the two women associations categories from the South West and North West Regions of Cameroon.

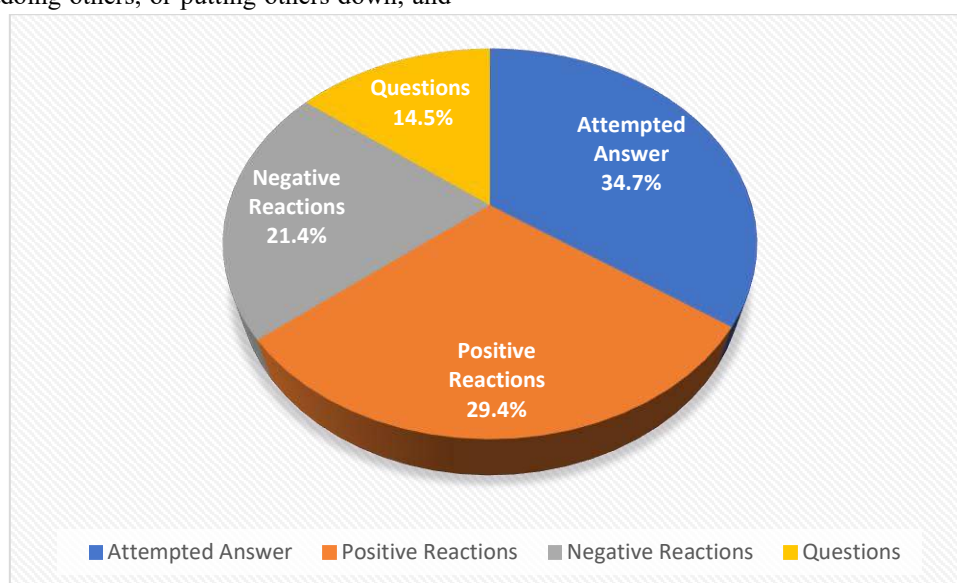


Fig.2: Rate of use of Politeness in Bales' Problem-solving Process

Table 4: Distribution of Politeness Super Strategies in Interactions of Women Associations from the Anglophone Cameroon

Associations	Politeness Super Strategies										Total	
	BOR		DDFTA		PP		NP		ORP			
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Faith-Based	430	8.9	21	0.4	3541	73.8	431	9	373	7.8	4,796	72.7
Development-Based	110	6.1	7	0.4	1100	61	234	13	352	19.5	1,803	27.3
Total	540	8.2	28	0.4	4,641	70.3	665	10.1	725	11	6,599	100

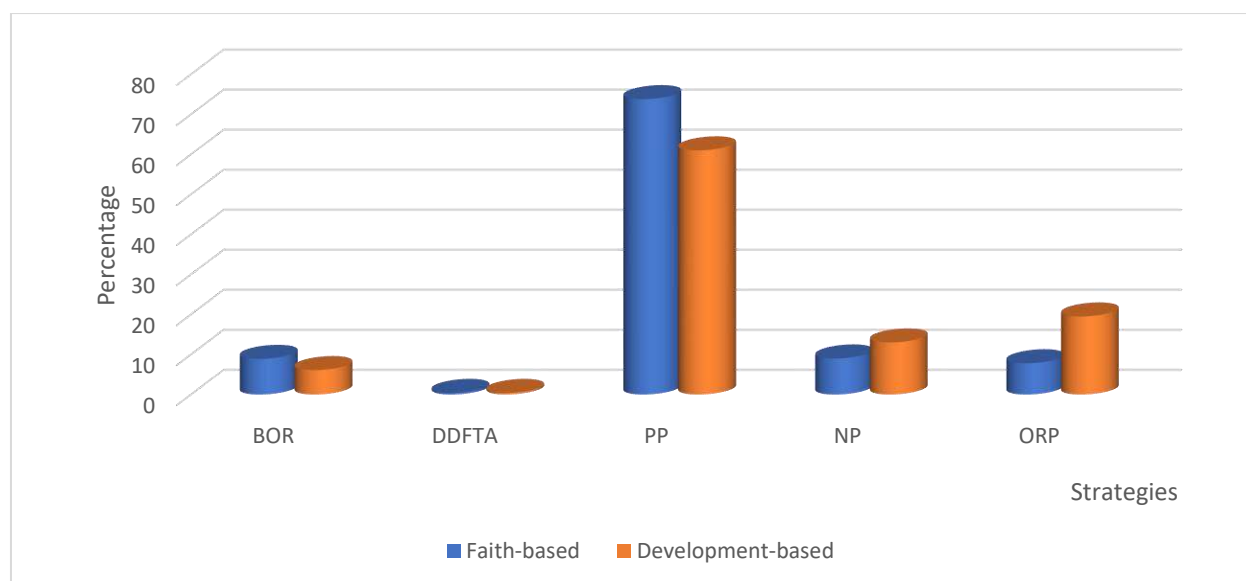


Fig.3: Rate of Use of Politeness Strategies during Interaction in Women Associations from the Anglophone Cameroon

As table 4 and figure 2 show, a total of 6,599 politeness strategies were used during these women gatherings. A majority of these strategies (4,796, that is 72.7%) were used in faith-based associations and 1,803 strategies, a percentage of 27.3, were used during interactions in development-based associations. Of the five super strategies of politeness proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), Positive Politeness (PP) was the most frequently employed super strategy in the activities of these women associations. It recorded an overall percentage of 70.3; that is 4,641 strategies used, with 3541 strategies (73.8%) used in faith-based associations and 1100 strategies (60%) used in development-based associations.

Because this politeness super strategy consists of redress directed to the addressee's positive face, his/her perennial desire that his/her wants (or the actions/acquisition/values resulting from them) should be thought of as desirable, (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p.101), members of these women associations employed it to demonstrate interest and approval of each other's personality, shared knowledge and implicit claims to reciprocity.

In the use of positive politeness, four sub strategies were regularly used during these women associations' events. These were PP4- Use in-group identity markers, (32.4% in faith-based events and 28.5% in development-based events), PP7- Presuppose/raise/assert common ground, (17.8% in faith-based events and 12.8% in development-based events), and PP5- Seek agreement, (10.5% in faith-based events and 9.5% in development-based events). It is important to note that PP12- Include both S and H in the activity, was more significant in faith-based events.

As indicated above, PP4 was more significant in the two categories of associations. This sub-strategy of positive politeness entails the use of "in-group usages of address forms, of language or dialect, of jargon or slang, and ellipsis" to convey in-group membership and to demonstrate solidarity, (Brown and Levinson 1987, p.107). One of the most common ways that in-group membership was expressed in these women interactions was through address forms. Address forms such as *mothers, mami dem, mami, Mami Ndong, Mami fada, manyi, Ma Vero, sister, sisters, papa Monsi, Mami Perla*, (from faith-based events) *comrades, massa, mami dem, sisters, orphans, bushfaller, brothers, sisters, boh, friends, fish, baby Ma Fri, and ma Vero* (from development-based events), demonstrated in-group solidarity. Also, indigenous languages, songs, ululations, in-group jargon and slangs were equally used to pass on important messages during events. These in-group markers reflected the tempo or atmosphere of events, revealing a spirit of solidarity among members. This was true of songs such as "jolie jolie oh", (a positive communicative act of rejoicing), from CWA NW01, "We are one, eh eh, we are together" from OHCTB03, (positive communicative act of rejoicing), and "CWA wuna kontinyue (an attempted answer communicative act). This politeness sub-strategy was equally used by members to convey in-group membership. This was evident in OHCTB where in-group songs such as 'Wen mai hat de swit oh', 'Midwaiv kam oh', 'O Unity', and 'Chicheh nape ndap' were used to express taboo subjects such as sex during a 'born-house' (birth celebration). Chiatoh and Lando (2021) assert that by using coded language, women create a community of practice that excludes males and children, thereby creating common ground and protecting the sanctity

of the female experience while adhering to public decency laws. The uses of these in-group identity markers abound in the expressions of positive reactions and attempted answers during meeting deliberations as illustrated in Communicative acts 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 from CGF SW0 and OHCTB0, respectively.

Communicative Act 1: *Masoma* (Thank you)

Context: CGF SW02

In communicative act 1 above, the coordinator of Gatsby Buea uses an in-group language, Duala, to express her gratitude for having been offered food. Duala is one of the indigenous languages spoken in the Littoral Region of Cameroon. It is also one of the three indigenous languages commonly used during activities in the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon. Although she is the coordinator of the programme (high power), she is expressing her gratitude for having been offered food (low imposition) in a 'born-house ceremony where everyone is expected to feel at ease (low social distance).

Another signal of in-group membership and of solidarity in these women events was the recitation of associations' mottos, slangs and slogans. The phrase *Through Mary... To Jesus* taken from Jn 2:12, was used in all the CWA events to signal common ground and in-group membership. Likewise, the phrase *If anyone is in Christ... He is a new creation*, taken from 2Cor 5:17 was used in all CWF events to assert common ground and in-group membership. In CGF, the phrase *Gatsby In... Poverty out!* was used and *One Hand!.. I no di tie bundle* was used in OHCTB events. Additionally, the slogan:

CWA women: Golden Women

Sowers of Hope: Reapers of Joy

Blessed are the peace makers: They shall be called children of God

Working together: For a Better Future

Unity of purpose: Unity of Action,

(Communicative act 2, Context: CWA),

was used in important CWA gatherings such as divisional meetings, provincial meetings and diocesan events to signal in-group membership and of solidarity. Likewise, the Bible verses *Christ is coming!... Coming with your pay*, taken from Rev. 22:12, and *With us in mind! ...God has a better plan*, taken from Heb 11:40, were used during CWF events to signal solidarity. These phrases were equally used for greetings, as attention getters, as concluding statements, for invitations, and even as signals of disapprovals.

Another means of signalling in-group membership and of solidarity that was peculiar to CWA was the use of Marian names for groups' identification. These are the virtues of the Blessed Virgin Mary adopted by groups for identification. As communicative act 3, 4 and 5 illustrate, these Marian names were used to address branches, zones, divisions and dioceses. The uses of these Marian names in addressing groups and groups' members reinforced the sense of belonging and of solidarity, a sign of togetherness, also reflecting low power and low social distance between members.

Communicative Act 3: *So, Haus of Gold wi de weit wuna fo preiyas*. (House of Gold we are still waiting for you to lead us in prayers).

Context: CWA NW01

Communicative Act 4: *As wi de weit, Seat of Wisdom go giv wi song*. (While we are waiting, Seat of Wisdom will tune us a song)

Context: CWA NW01

Communicative Act 5: *Mami dem wuna shidon akodin tu divishon... Mirror of Justice... Mother of Christ, Mate Deio, Good Council, Queen of Peace, Spiritual Vessel...* (Mothers sit according to divisions. Mirror of Justice, Mother of Christ, Mother of God, Good Council, Queen of Peace, Spiritual Vessel...)

Context: CWA SW02

These findings of the high use of in-group markers and address forms during events of women associations from the South West and North West regions of Cameroon; communication strategies expressing solidarity, cooperation and common background, go a long way to confirm wood's assertion that for women, the content of talk is dealt with, but usually not without serious attention to the feelings involved, (Wood, 1994, as cited in Verderber 1995). This also confirms Anchimbe's (2008) and Echu's (2008) claim that in-group identity markers, address forms and kinship terms do not only bring interactions closer to addressee and speaker in terms of distance, but are also used by interlocutors to express politeness.

Although of minimal occurrence, off record politeness is the second in the rank of politeness use in the 24 analysed meetings. 725 strategies of off record politeness were used in the 24 sampled meetings events, giving us 11% coverage. Although Brown and Levinson assert that off record strategies are usually employed when speakers want to

avoid the responsibility for doing them, leaving them open to the addressee to decide how to interpret them, the findings of this study reveal that off record politeness use during events in women association from the Anglophone Cameroon, showed evidence of members desire to connect with one another. For instance, in **Communicative act 6:** *Lo don kach loya! Lo don kach loya!* (The law has been violated by the lawyer! The law has been violated by the lawyer), an ORP9 strategy (Use metaphors), the president of OHCTB is indirectly apologising for being late and at the same time indirectly accepting the punishment for her offense. Although she is the president of the association (high power), she is also a member too (low social distance). However, she is one of those who came late, a sign of non-commitment (high imposition) and therefore has to pay the fine for lateness.

The findings reveal that the most frequently used off record sub-strategies were ORP4- Understates, (24.3% in faith-based and 16.8% in development-based events), and ORP12- Be vague, (21.4% in faith-based and 27.3% in development-based events). Communicative act 7 below illustrates the use of two ORP sub-strategies- Use metaphor (ORP9) and be ambiguous (ORP11) in CWF North West and CGF North West, respectively. For instance, in communicative act 7 below, which is a negative reaction communicative act, an elderly member of CWF is using a metaphor (ORP 9) and Be ambiguous (ORP11), to disagree with another member's suggestion.

Communicative Act 7 : *Ai sei eh! Na hau dat prodigal son tori deh egein so eh? Weh dem bin sei meik yi chop fo masta yi teibl bet yi disaid fo chop na swain yi chop fo wait man kontri?* (Can someone remind us of that prodigal son story, the person who refused affluence offered by his father just to go and eat scraps in the white man's land).

Context: CWF NW02

In a previous utterance, a participant had suggested that the divisional rally be reduced from two days to a day, and some members had applauded her for that suggestion. To blame her and to demonstrate the waywardness of such wrong suggestions, this elderly member uses a metaphor (ORP 9), and an ambiguous statement (ORP 11). Although she has high power over most members, due to her age and the fact that she had once been a divisional president of the association, she is addressing the whole group (low social distance). However, her utterance is face-threatening because it is a criticism and a blame (high imposition), hence the use of a metaphor, an ambiguous communicative act, flouting Grice's maxims of quality and manner.

It is interesting to note that there was a higher rate of use of ORP strategies in development-based associations- 19.5%

as opposed to 7.8% for faith-based events. This is probably due to the fact that the recovery of loan from recalcitrant members was a major topic of discussion in development-based association meetings. In order to avoid face threatening members who have not complied with the loan refund policies, members used indirect communicative strategies to confront them. Communicative act 8 and 9 from CGF North West illustrates this.

Communicative Act 8: We de shidon so, una no de know say Casanova them there inside we? (We are unaware that Casanovas are among us here)

Context: CGF NW01

Communicative Act 9: Casanova them plenty inside here. (There are so many Casanovas among us)

Context: CGF NW01

In order to avoid direct confrontation with members who do not want to comply with the loan refund policy of Gatsby Foundation, a male member (low power and low social distance) expresses a negative reaction communicative act of complain (high imposition) using the ORP strategies 13- Over generalise and 9- Use metaphors in communicative act 8 (high imposition), flouting Grice's maxims of manner and quality. Communicative act 9 is response from a female member, confirming what is said, also flouting the maxims of manner and quality.

The third in the ranking of politeness use is Negative Politeness. A total of 665 strategies, 10.1% of this politeness strategy was used during these women association interactions. Brown and Levinson hypothesise that negative politeness is an avoidance-based communication strategy which is the "heart of respect behaviour," consisting of communicative acts of redress directed to the addressee's negative face: his want to have his freedom of action unhindered and his attention unimpeded, (p.129). Its linguistic realizations consist of conventional indirectness, hedges on illocutionary force, polite pessimism (about the success of request etc.), and the emphasis on H's relative power oriented mainly towards partially satisfying (redressing) this negative face, (p.70). The most frequently used sub-strategies of negative politeness in meeting events observed and recorded were NP2- Question, hedge (42.3% in development-based events and 34.3% in faith-based events), NP4-Minimize the imposition, Rx (22.2% in development-based and 22% in faith-based), and NP5- Give deference (9.5% in faith-based and 9.4% in development-based).

Although Brown and Levinson theorise that negative politeness strategies are "forms useful in general for social

distancing" (p.130), the findings of this study reveal that the use of negative politeness during associations' events had an opposite effect. Their uses were intended to create equality and to include others. Communicative acts 10 and 11 illustrate this. This discredits Lakoff (1975), who claim that women's use of hedges, qualifiers, and tag questions, represent lack of confidence and uncertainty and a sign of powerlessness.

Communicative Act 10: *Through Mary, meik wi teik taim de wei wi de tok, nois ova plenti.* (Through Mary! We should be careful in the way we talk. There is so much noise).

Context: CWA NW03

In communicative act 10, a negative reaction communicative act of criticising, the branch president of CWA, Ark of the Covenant Branch, Ntambeng hedges her criticism (high imposition) of members (low power and Low distance) who were conversing while deliberations were going on in the meeting with the particle *Through Mary*. The phrase *Through Mary*, weakened the force of the criticism that came with the utterance.

Likewise in the attempted answer communicative act of suggesting below, the coordinator of Gatsby Muyuka is distanced herself from the imposition of fines on recalcitrant members with the phrase *Wen lo deh, dem go help wi* (If there are rules and regulations, we shall all benefit from them). Also, by saying *Yu no sei yuman bin deh so bai neicho, if yu no put ruls, yi no go du tin dem wel* (It is said that providing rules help control human beings), she is signalling her intention to not impose but compelled to do so due to circumstances.

Communicative Act 11: *Ai de jos soges somtin. Yu no sei yuman bin deh so bai neicho, if yu no put ruls, yi no go du tin dem wel. Wen lo deh, dem go help wi.* (I wish to suggest something. It is said that providing rules help control human beings. If there are rules and regulations, we shall all benefit from them).

Context: CGF SW01

Members of women associations also performed acts baldly, without redressive actions, in conformity with Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle's maxims of quality, quantity, manner and relation. Though minimally used, the

result of the use of bald on record politeness (BOR) also reveals closeness among members of these women groups. A total of 540 strategies of BOR, that is 8.2% overall were used to effect thought units during associations' events. The results show that in situations where risk of face loss was minimal, members of CWA, CWF, CGF, BSRFTU and OHCTB spoke in direct, clear unambiguous and concise ways, in conformity of Grice's (1975) CP maxims. In communicative act 12 below, in respond to the coordinator's question of *Malingo wimen, wuna bin get problem. Hau wuna don sovam?* (Malingo women, what have you done with the problem you had?), the president of the group responded in clear, concise and unambiguous manner, conforming to all of Grice's CP maxims as follows:

Communicative Act 12: *Wi bin pik aut ol dous membas dem weh dem bi de dilei wi las yie fo bring dia moni. Den wi tel dem sei durin de nesk seshon, dem no go join wi fo teik loun. Wi de stil obzev dat nau so.* (We have identified all those members who delayed in the payments of loan last year. They have been informed of the likelihood of no longer receiving loans. They are still undergoing observations)

Context: CGF SW01

Lastly, because women use collaborative and cooperative talk to create and maintain relationships, there is usually minimal use of Don't Do the FTA (DDFTA). Only 28 strategies of DDFTA were found in the transcripts, a percentage of 0.4 overall. Rather than keep their grievances, members expressed them so that they could have answers to their doubts. In CWA SW02 for instance, a member whom others told to keep her complain to herself responded: *Ai beg wuna lef mi meik ai tok* (Please, permit me to say something). And after expressing herself when she was given the opportunity, she declared: *Through Mary! Ai don finish tok* (Through Mary! I am done talking). The behaviour of this member demonstrates that the expression of feelings is an important aspect of interaction among women. This is because communication to women is a tool for building relationship and expressing solidarity and connection.

4.2 Variations and Similarities in Politeness Use in Women Association Interactions

The findings from the observed meetings show that there were commonalities as well as differences in the frequency as well as the composition of politeness strategies employed during interactions in the two categories of associations. The data reveals that more of positive politeness strategies were used during interactions in the both association types. However, while off record politeness was also preferred in development-based associations' events, negative

politeness and bald on record were higher in faith-based associations. This was probably because most development-based associations' meeting deliberations were centred on how loans could be recovered from defaulters. During discussions, members expressed their feelings and opinions using off-record strategies.

Don't Do the FTA was very minimal in the two categories of associations. All of the DDFTAs used were in carrying out negative reaction communicative acts. For instance, in CGF NW03, members refused speaking when the coordinator (high power) asked them to give suggestions on the type of punishment (high imposition) the group should give a recalcitrant member (low social distance) who was present in the meeting.

Also, in OHCTB, members (Low power) were afraid to scold (high imposition) the president who came late to the meeting. Other late comers were asked to pay the fine of 50frs, except the president. Although she herself felt guilty and exclaimed: *Lo don kach loya! Lo don kach loya!*, an apology, nobody had the courage to remind her later to pay the fine.

While songs and gestures were generally used to express politeness in the two categories of associations, instruments such as whistles and gong were used more in faith-based associations. Equally, the attributes and virtues of the Blessed Virgin Mary were commonly used during events of CWA as address forms and in-group identity marker (PP4). This was not observed in any other association's interactions.

V. CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore politeness use during interactions in women associations from the South West and North West regions of Cameroon in order to reveal their functions in groups' dynamics of Anglophone Cameroon women. Specifically, it sought to identify these politeness strategies and to explore the extent to which their use function to reveal communication practices and interaction patterns of Anglophone Cameroon women (North West and South West). Lastly, it explored the commonalities and differences in the use of this conversational rule in the various women associations' events.

The constant use of certain strategies of politeness during group's events in Anglophone Cameroon women associations' interactions reveals significant traits of women's interaction ethics: the use of collaborative and cooperative talk to create and maintain relationships, the avoidance of criticisms or making it gentle if it could not be avoided, the avoidance of outdoing others, or putting others down, and the tendency of paying attention to others and to

relationships. The findings which reveal that positive politeness strategies abound in the interactions of both categories of associations confirms this. PP4- Use in-group identity markers, PP7- Presuppose/raise/assert common ground and PP5- Seek agreement were the most frequently used strategies. However, PP12- include both S and H in the activity was significant in faith-based events. This high use of PP4, PP5, PP7 and PP12 in these women association events; communication strategies expressing in-group solidarity, cooperation and common background, go a long way to confirm Wood's assertion that for women, the content of talk is dealt with, but usually not without serious attention to the feelings involved, (1994, as cited in Verderber, 1995).

Though to a lesser extent, members of these associations also used negative politeness, off record politeness and Bald on record politeness strategies during interactions. Of these three politeness super strategies, off record politeness topped the list, with ORP4- understates, and ORP12- Be vague, being the most frequently employed strategies. For negative politeness, NP2- Question, hedge, NP4- Minimize the imposition, Rx, and NP5- Give deference were the most frequently used. As the findings reveal, the constant use of NP2- Question, hedge and NP4- Minimize the imposition, Rx during meeting deliberations demonstrate members' desire to keep conversation open and to include others.

Equally, members of CWA, CWF, CGF, BSRFTU and OHCTB spoke in direct, clear unambiguous and concise way in conformity to Grice's (1975) CP maxim of quality, quantity, manner and relation. This was done in situations where risk of face loss was minimal. These strategies were also minimally explored during events in the two association categories.

Lastly, there was very minimal use of DDFTA- a silent strategy of communication. Rather than keep their grievances, members expressed them so that they could have answers to their doubts. This goes a long way to confirm Wood's (1994 as cited in Verderber, 1995) view that because women use collaborative and cooperative talk to create and maintain relationships, there is usually minimal use of silent strategies of communication. The above use of politeness demonstrates that communication for members of these women groups does not only revolve around discussing issues. It also entails connecting with one another.

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Appendix A

Songs

Song No 1. Midwaiv Kam oh

Midwaiv kam oh, Midwaiv kam oh
Cham, cham.
Mai weis oh, mai wei oh,
Cham, cham.
Tu man wok oh, wan man kari am oh
Cham, cham.

English rendering

Midwife come oh, Midwife come oh
Cham, cham
Oh, my waist hurts. Oh, my waist hurts,
Cham, cham.
Two people have worked and one person bears the pains
Cham, cham.

Song No. 2 Wen mai hat de veks oh

Wen mai hat de veks oh, wen mai hat de veks oh
Wen mai hat de veks oh, ai ben mai fut
Chorus: Yeh yeh wen mai hat de veks oh, ai ben mai fut

Wen mai hat de veks oh, wen mai hat de veks oh
Wen mai hat de veks oh, ai we kolan
Chorus: Yeh yeh wen mai hat de veks oh ai we kolan

Wen mai hat de veks oh, wen mai hat de veks oh
Wen mai hat de veks oh, oh ai ton mai bak
Chorus: Yeh yeh wen mai hat de veks oh ai ton mai bak

Wen mai hat de swit oh, wen mai hat de swit oh
Wen mai hat de swit oh ai show mai feis
Chorus: Yeh yeh wen mai hat de swit oh ai show mai feis

English rendering

When I am sad, when I am sad
When I am sad, I bend my legs.
Chorus: Yeh yeh, when I am sad, I bend my legs.

When I am sad, when I am sad
When I am sad, I wear panties.
Chorus: Yeh yeh, when I am sad, I wear panties.

When I am happy, when I am happy
When I am happy, I give in.
Chorus: Yeh yeh, when I am happy, I give in.

Song No 3. Chiche nape ndap

Chiche nape ndab
Chorus: ehion
Ben ndabe e boh ateh
Chorus: ehion
Chiche nape ndab
Chorus: ehion
Ben ndabe e boh ateh

Chorus: ehion, ehion, ehion, ehion.
(akosse)

English Rendering

What renders the house clean?
It's the broom.
So that it can comfort its host?
It's the broom.
What renders the house clean?
It's the broom.
So that it can comfort its host?
It's the broom, it's the broom, it's the broom, it's the broom.

Mother Mary precious
Mother Mary precious, I can't leave you

Precious, precious oh
Precious, precious, I can't leave you
Father Monsi precious,
Father Monsi precious, I can't leave you

Chorus: Precious, precious oh
Precious, precious, i can't leave you.

Song No 4. CWA wuna Kontinye!

CWA, wuna kontiniu,
God yi deh fo wuna bak oh!
Wuna no tia, wuna kontinyue,
God yi deh fo wuna bak oh!
House of Gold oh, wuna no tia, wuna kontinyue,
God yi deh fo wuna bak oh!
Wuna no tia, wuna kontinyue
God yi deh fo wuna bak oh!

Mother of our Saviour, wuna no tia, wuna kontinyue,
God yi deh fo wuna bak oh!
Wuna no tia, wuna kontinyue
God yi deh fo wuna bak oh!

English Rendering

CWA don't give up,
God is on your side,
Don't give up, keep moving.
God is on your side.

House of Gold, don't give up,
God is on your side,
Don't give up, keep moving.
God is on your side.

Mother of our Saviour, don't give up,
God is on your side,
Don't give up, keep moving.
God is on your side.

Song No. 5 Jolie, jolie je ne le peut pas tes laisser

Jolie, jolie oh
Jolie, jolie je ne le peut pas tes laisser.
Mama Marie jolie,
Mama Marie jolie, je ne le peut pas tes laisser.

Papa Monsi jolie oh
Papa Monsi jolie je ne le peut pas tes laisser
Jolie, jolie
Chorus: Jolie, jolie
Jolie, jolie je ne le peut pas tes laisser.

English Rendering

Precious, precious oh
Precious, precious, I can't leave you



A Study of Health Conditions and Socio-Economic Challenges among Urban Slum Dwellers in Sonipat City

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Abstract— Rapid urbanization in India has led to the expansion of slum settlements marked by overcrowding, inadequate housing, poor sanitation, water scarcity, and limited access to healthcare services. These conditions collectively pose serious threats to the health and well-being of slum dwellers. The study employs a descriptive and analytical research design using primary data collected from 500 households through structured questionnaires. Major indicators analyzed include prevalence of vaccination coverage, maternal and child health practices, substance use, and social exclusion. Findings reveal that poor sanitation, open drainage, and water scarcity significantly contribute to the spread of waterborne and vector borne diseases. Although polio vaccination coverage is universal, immunization for pneumonia and hepatitis remains inadequate, reflecting gaps in awareness and healthcare outreach. While institutional deliveries have increased due to government schemes, a substantial proportion of home births persists, exposing mothers and infants to avoidable risks. Economic vulnerability forces most households to depend on government hospitals, self medication, or traditional healers, often delaying timely treatment. Alarming, nearly 45 percent of households reported fatalities due to financial constraints in accessing healthcare. Substance use, particularly tobacco and alcohol, is widespread, further aggravating health and economic stress. Poverty and unemployment emerged as the most critical challenges, underpinning poor housing, food insecurity, and health outcomes. The study underscores the need for integrated urban health policies focusing on strengthened primary healthcare, improved sanitation and water infrastructure, nutrition security, substance abuse intervention, and inclusive social support systems.



Keywords— Urban Slums, Environmental Conditions, Health Outcomes, Healthcare Accessibility, Socio-Economic Vulnerability

I. INTRODUCTION

Urbanization is one of the most significant socio-spatial transformations shaping contemporary societies across the globe. In developing countries, particularly in Asia and Africa, rapid urban growth has occurred in a largely unplanned and uneven manner, resulting in the proliferation of informal settlements commonly referred to as slums. According to the United Nations, slums are characterized by inadequate access to safe water, poor sanitation, overcrowding, non-durable housing, and insecure tenure (UN-Habitat, 2003). These settlements represent a visible manifestation of urban poverty and

socio-economic exclusion, posing serious challenges to sustainable urban development and public health. In India, where urbanization has accelerated sharply since the economic reforms of the 1990s, the expansion of slums has become an integral feature of urban landscapes, particularly in rapidly growing secondary cities and urban peripheries.

India's urban population increased from 27.8 percent in 2001 to 31.2 percent in 2011, and this share is projected to exceed 40 percent by 2035 (Census of India, 2011; UN DESA, 2019). This growth has been driven by natural population increase, rural-to-urban migration, and the

reclassification of rural areas into urban jurisdictions. However, the capacity of urban local bodies to provide adequate housing, infrastructure, and basic services has not kept pace with this expansion. As a result, a significant proportion of the urban poor are compelled to reside in slums and informal settlements, often located on marginal lands such as riverbanks, railway corridors, industrial zones, and flood-prone areas. These spatially and socially marginalized settlements reflect deep structural inequalities embedded within urban systems. Slums are not merely residential spaces; they are complex socio-economic systems shaped by poverty, informality, and vulnerability. Slum dwellers are predominantly engaged in informal and low-paid occupations such as construction work, domestic labour, street vending, waste picking, and small-scale manufacturing. The absence of stable employment and social security exposes households to chronic income insecurity, limiting their ability to invest in adequate housing, nutrition, education, and healthcare (Kundu, 2014). Consequently, slum populations experience multidimensional deprivation that extends beyond income poverty to encompass deficits in living conditions, health status, and social well-being.

The living environment in slums plays a critical role in shaping health outcomes. Poor housing quality, characterized by kutchha or semi-pucca structures, inadequate ventilation, and overcrowded living spaces, increases exposure to respiratory infections, tuberculosis, and other communicable diseases (Buttenheim, 2008). Inadequate access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities contributes to the prevalence of waterborne diseases such as diarrhea, cholera, and typhoid, which disproportionately affect children and the elderly (WHO, 2019). Women and children, in particular, face heightened health risks due to malnutrition, reproductive health challenges, and inadequate maternal and child healthcare services (Gupta & Mitra, 2015). Although government initiatives such as the National Health Mission and Janani Suraksha Yojana have improved access to institutional deliveries and immunization coverage, significant gaps persist in healthcare outreach and service quality in slum areas.

Urban slums also reflect spatial inequities in the distribution of urban infrastructure and services. While cities are often portrayed as centres of opportunity and development, slum settlements remain excluded from formal planning processes and municipal service provision. In many cases, slums lack legal recognition, which restricts their access to piped water supply, sewerage networks, solid waste management, and electricity connections. This exclusion reinforces a cycle of neglect, where poor living conditions contribute to

adverse health outcomes, which in turn undermine productivity and income generation, perpetuating poverty and vulnerability (UN-Habitat, 2016). In recent years, there has been growing recognition of the need to address slum conditions through inclusive urban development strategies. Global frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 11, emphasize the importance of making cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable, with a specific target to improve the living conditions of slum dwellers. In the Indian context, policy initiatives such as the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban), Swachh Bharat Mission, and Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) aim to enhance housing, sanitation, and basic urban services. However, the effectiveness of these programs varies across regions and cities, underscoring the need for localized, evidence-based assessments of slum conditions and health outcomes.

Haryana, one of the fastest growing states in India, has witnessed rapid urban expansion due to industrialization, infrastructural development, and its strategic location within the Delhi NCR. Sonipat City, in particular, has emerged as an important urban centre owing to its proximity to Delhi, improved connectivity, and growing industrial and educational base. This rapid growth has attracted a large migrant population from neighbouring states, leading to the formation and expansion of slum settlements within and around the city. These slums accommodate a heterogeneous population characterized by economic vulnerability, insecure livelihoods, and limited access to urban amenities. Despite its growing importance, Sonipat City has received limited scholarly attention with respect to the living conditions and health status of its slum population. Existing studies on urban slums in India have largely focused on metropolitan cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, and Kolkata, often overlooking medium sized and emerging cities where the pace of urban change is equally rapid. Understanding the socio-economic and environmental conditions of slum dwellers in such cities is crucial for designing context specific interventions that address local needs and challenges. The present study seeks to bridge this gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of the living conditions, environmental health risks, and health status of slum populations in Sonipat City. By examining housing quality, sanitation, water supply, drainage, income, education, and access to healthcare services, the study aims to elucidate the complex interrelationships between socio-economic vulnerability and health outcomes. Such an integrated approach is essential for capturing the multidimensional nature of deprivation experienced by slum dwellers and for identifying priority areas for policy intervention.

From a geographical perspective, the study underscores the importance of spatial context in shaping health and well-being. Slum settlements are not randomly distributed but are shaped by historical processes, land use patterns, and urban governance structures. Their location on environmentally fragile and infrastructure deficient sites exacerbates exposure to health risks and environmental hazards. By situating the analysis within the broader framework of urban geography and public health, the study contributes to an interdisciplinary understanding of urban poverty and health inequalities. This study, therefore, aims to contribute to the existing body of literature by providing a detailed and context-specific examination of slum living conditions and health outcomes

in Sonipat City, with broader implications for inclusive and sustainable urban development.

II. VACCINATION GIVEN TO CHILDREN IN SLUMS

Poor sanitation, overcrowding, and polluted surroundings make slums highly vulnerable to infectious and vector borne diseases. Despite ongoing awareness initiatives by NGOs and government agencies, many slum residents still face significant health challenges. Vaccination coverage, maternal health, and hygiene-related behaviour are major indicators of the health status of such populations.

Table 1: Type of Vaccination Given to Children

Type of Vaccination	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Polio Drops	500	100.0
Pneumonia Vaccine	124	24.8
Tetanus Injection	398	79.6
BCG	383	76.6
Hepatitis Vaccine	201	40.2

Source: Prepared by research scholar based on Primary Survey, 2025

Table 1 shows the pattern of vaccination among children in the surveyed families. It is encouraging that 100% of respondents reported that their children received polio drops, reflecting the success of India's long-standing Pulse Polio Programme. However, coverage for other essential vaccines remains comparatively low. Only 24.8% of respondents reported that their children had received pneumonia vaccines, while 79.6% had received tetanus injections, and 76.6% reported BCG vaccination. 40.2% stated that their children were vaccinated against hepatitis. The data points to uneven vaccination coverage in slum areas, primarily due to lack of awareness, irregular healthcare access, and occasional negligence by health workers. Some parents also avoid visiting hospitals due to long waiting times, loss of daily wages, or misconceptions about vaccine safety. This inconsistency in immunization

coverage highlights the urgent need to strengthen community level health education and door-to-door vaccination campaigns, especially targeting underprivileged and migrant families.

III. BIRTH PLACE OF CHILDREN IN THE SLUM

Table 2 reveals the preferred locations for childbirth among respondents' families. A majority (54.4%) reported that deliveries occurred in civil hospitals, while 20.2% preferred private hospitals, indicating a shift toward institutional delivery practices. However, a significant 25.4% of respondents still reported home births, which remain a concern for maternal and child health.

Table 2: Birth Place of Children in the Family

Birth Place of Children	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Civil Hospital	272	54.4
Private Hospital	101	20.2
Home	127	25.4
Total	500	100.0

Source: Prepared by research scholar based on Primary Survey, 2025

While institutional deliveries are gradually increasing due to government initiatives like Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) and LaQshya, home deliveries persist mainly due to poverty, traditional beliefs, lack of awareness, and limited accessibility to healthcare facilities. In some cases, cultural norms and the dominance of traditional birth attendants continue to influence women's preferences. Although around 80% of families now prefer hospital deliveries, one-fourth still rely on home births, which increases risks of infection, hemorrhage, and neonatal complications. Studies (NFHS-5, 2019-21) confirm that institutional deliveries reduce neonatal mortality significantly compared to home births. Thus, further strengthening

maternal health outreach in slum areas is essential for ensuring safe motherhood and child survival.

IV. CAESAREAN DELIVERIES - A RISING TREND

Table 3 presents data regarding the medical methods of childbirth among respondents. It reveals that 95 percent of the respondents reported normal deliveries, while only 5 percent experienced caesarean sections. Globally, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that caesarean births should not exceed 15 percent of total deliveries.

Table 3: Method of Delivery of Child

Method of Delivery of Child	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Normal Delivery	475	95.0
Caesarean Delivery	25	5.0
Total	500	100.0

Source: Prepared by research scholar based on Primary Survey, 2025

The findings from this survey indicate that the selected slum areas are far below this threshold, suggesting a preference for natural childbirth. This may be attributed to limited access to expensive private hospitals, traditional beliefs about childbirth, and a lack of medical intervention facilities in nearby health centres.

Although a lower rate of caesarean delivery is medically desirable when unnecessary interventions are avoided, it may also reflect inadequate availability of emergency obstetric care for women who genuinely need it. Thus, while the statistics appear ideal, they may also point to

challenges in access to specialized maternal health services for economically weaker families.

V. MANAGEMENT OF HEALTH EXPENSES

Table 4 presents how respondents manage their health related expenses. The data shows that 70 percent of respondents rely on their savings for medical treatment, while 30 percent depend on borrowing from relatives or friends. A significant 80 percent of respondents reported complete dependence on government hospitals for healthcare needs.

Table 4: Management of Health Expenses

Management of Health Expenses	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Through Savings	350	70.0
Borrow from Relatives or Friends	150	30.0
Totally Dependent on Government Hospitals	400	80.0
Total (Multiple Responses)	500	—

Source: Prepared by research scholar based on Primary Survey, 2025

This clearly highlights the economic fragility of slum dwellers, who cannot afford private healthcare. The overdependence on government hospitals reflects both affordability issues and trust in free medical services, even though such facilities often lack quality infrastructure,

timely services, and specialist doctors. Strengthening public healthcare facilities, particularly in slum areas, is crucial for improving overall health standards and ensuring equitable access to essential medical services.

VI. TYPE OF HEALTH CARE AND FATALITIES IN THE FAMILY

Table 5 demonstrates the preferred healthcare options among respondents. A majority (62 percent) visit civil hospitals for treatment, while only 6.6 percent can afford

private hospitals. Around 11.6 percent purchase medicines directly from pharmacies without prescriptions, and 19.8 percent rely on traditional healers or home remedies (Figure 1).

Table 5: Type of Hospital for Health Care

Type of Hospital / Health Care Source	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Civil Hospital	310	62.0
Private Hospital	33	6.6
Pharmacist / Medicine Shop	58	11.6
Home Remedies / Traditional Healer	99	19.8
Total	500	100.0

Source: Prepared by research scholar based on Primary Survey, 2025

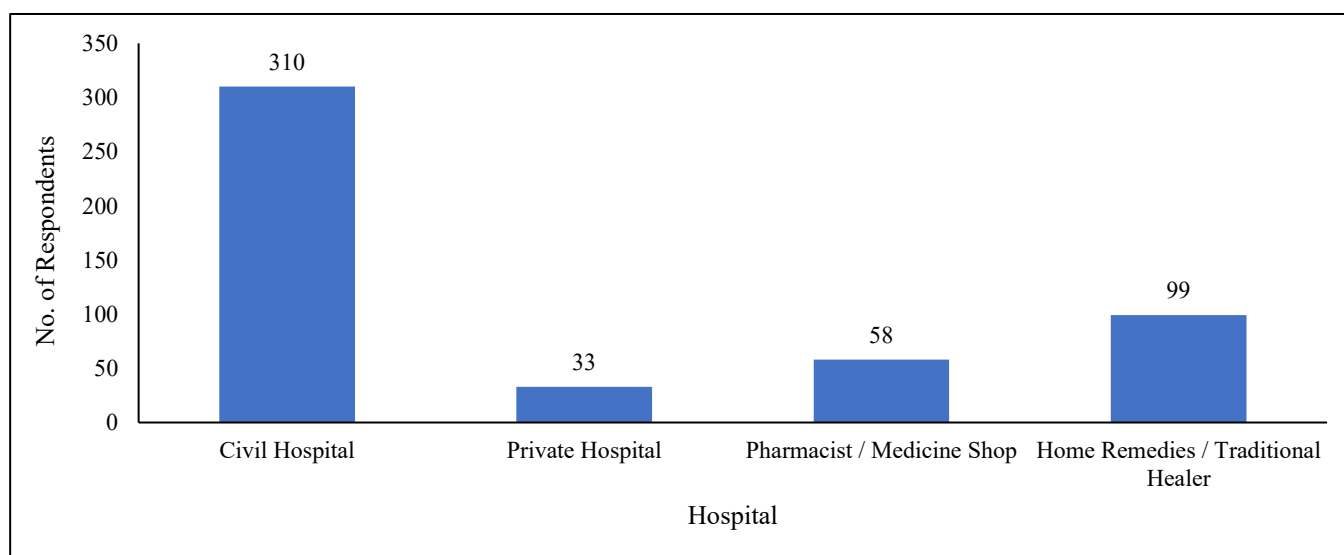


Fig.1: Type of Hospital for Health Care

Source: Based on table 5

Such practices indicate a concerning trend of self-medication and dependence on unqualified practitioners, often driven by economic constraints, limited awareness, and long waiting hours at government hospitals. These behaviours can lead to complications, delayed treatment, and even fatalities in severe cases. The findings highlight an urgent need for awareness campaigns on safe medical practices, improved public healthcare delivery, and stricter regulation of over the counter medicine sales.

Healthcare and hygiene practices in slum settlements are shaped by complex socio-economic realities. The data across these tables reveals that while the majority of respondents attempt to maintain hygiene and seek medical

care, their efforts are often hindered by poverty, inadequate infrastructure, and limited awareness.

The overwhelming preference for normal deliveries, though medically desirable, must be viewed with caution, it may also signify restricted access to modern obstetric facilities. The presence of differently abled persons and their inadequate healthcare further reflect the marginalization of vulnerable groups. Most families lack savings or insurance coverage, leaving them dependent on government health schemes or informal borrowing networks.

Self-medication and reliance on traditional healers remain widespread, indicating a combination of cultural continuity and economic compulsion. Despite the availability of

government hospitals, their quality and accessibility remain questionable. Slum dwellers, therefore, oscillate between affordability and accessibility, often compromising their health and well-being. In essence, the findings call for policy interventions that focus on strengthening primary healthcare systems, ensuring

consistent doctor availability, and conducting health awareness drives tailored for marginalized urban populations. Providing affordable insurance coverage and community based rehabilitation for differently abled individuals could significantly uplift the overall health profile of slum residents.

Table 6: Fatality in the Family Due to Financial Constraints

Causality (Deaths in Family)	No. of Respondents	Percentage
One	173	34.6
Two	52	10.4
Four	0	0.0
No Such Death	275	55.0
Total	500	100.0

Source: Prepared by research scholar based on Primary Survey, 2025

Table 6 highlights the fatalities reported by families due to lack of financial resources for timely or proper medical treatment. The findings reveal that 34.6 percent of households experienced one death in their family linked to financial hardship, while 10.4 percent of households lost two members under similar circumstances. The remaining 55 percent did not report any fatality caused by economic constraints. Thus, nearly 45 percent of the surveyed families have lost a family member primarily due to poverty-related treatment issues. This figure represents a serious social and public health concern. It indicates that, despite government welfare schemes and hospital facilities, a large proportion of slum residents still face preventable deaths because they cannot afford medical expenses, delay seeking treatment, or rely on unqualified practitioners.

Such data emphasizes the urgent need for healthcare reforms and income generation measures for slum

dwellers. Improving accessibility to emergency medical services, providing free essential medicines, and implementing targeted health insurance coverage for urban poor families can reduce mortality caused by financial inability to seek treatment.

VII. FREQUENCY OF FAMILY SLEPT WITHOUT FOOD

Table 7 shows the frequency with which slum families had to sleep without food. Data indicates that 6.6 percent of households reported fasting involuntarily for an entire day due to lack of food, while 5.6 percent went without one meal in a day. Additionally, 2.8 percent stated that they had experienced hunger on multiple occasions. However, 85 percent of the respondents reported that they have not slept without food, indicating some level of food security within a majority of the families.

Table 7: Number of Times Family Slept Without Food

Frequency of Sleeping Without Food	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Whole Day	33	6.6
Without One Meal	28	5.6
Many a Times	14	2.8
Never	425	85.0
Total	500	100.0

Source: Prepared by research scholar based on Primary Survey, 2025

Despite this, the fact that nearly 15 percent of families have faced hunger at some point is deeply concerning, especially in an era when the Right to Food is recognized as a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution. These figures not only represent material deprivation but also psychological distress among families who live in constant uncertainty about their next meal.

Hunger among slum populations also undermines children's health, learning capacity, and overall well-being. Poor nutritional intake contributes to higher susceptibility to diseases, stunted growth, and fatigue, further perpetuating the cycle of poverty and malnutrition. To address these challenges, the government and civil society must ensure that no family is left out of food welfare programs. The introduction of urban nutrition missions, expansion of anganwadi services, and door-to-door distribution of essential food grains can significantly reduce food insecurity in slum settlements.

VIII. SUBSTANCE USE AND ADDICTIVE HABITS

In many economically disadvantaged households, the consumption of tobacco, alcohol, and other addictive substances is surprisingly widespread, despite persistent financial hardship. The prevalence of such behaviours reflects both social and environmental factors that influence household decision making and coping strategies. Financial stress, coupled with limited recreational options and chronic exposure to urban hardships, often leads adults to use substances as a means of temporary relief or escape. In turn, this behaviour can have cascading effects on family dynamics, household expenditure, and overall well-being.

Youth in slum areas are particularly vulnerable to developing addictive habits due to a lack of adequate parental supervision, weak community monitoring, and exposure to antisocial influences within their immediate environment. Peer pressure, informal social networks, and interactions with older community members who engage in substance use further reinforce these behaviours.

Table 8: Type of Addiction in the Family

Type of Addiction	No. of Addicts	Percentage
Tobacco	173	34.6
Beedi/Cigarette	418	83.6
Alcohol	250	50.0
Other Drugs	33	6.6
No Addiction	74	14.8
Total (multiple responses)	—	—

Source: Prepared by research scholar based on Primary Survey, 2025

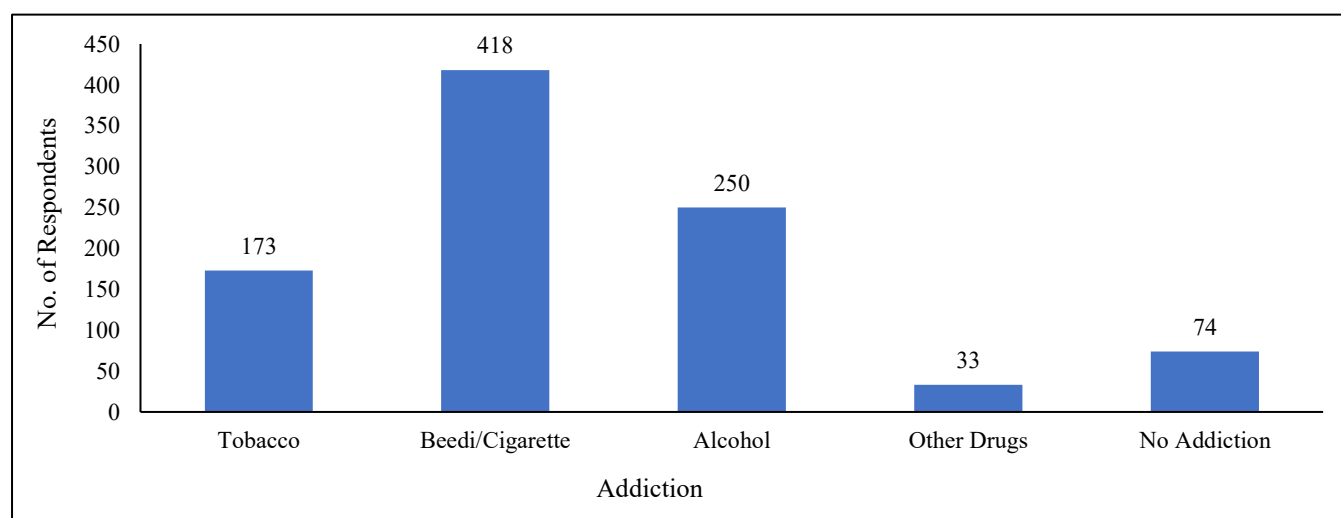


Fig.2: Type of Addiction in the Family

Source: Based on table 8

Additionally, the portrayal of smoking, drinking, and other substance related behaviours in popular media and entertainment contributes to their normalization, making such practices appear socially acceptable or aspirational among urban slum populations. The combined effect of these factors not only increases the risk of addiction but also exacerbates health disparities, reduces productivity, and perpetuates cycles of poverty and social vulnerability within these communities. Table 8 presents a detailed overview of substance use within households in the surveyed slum areas, revealing the prevalence and patterns of addiction. The data show that 34.6 percent of families had at least one member addicted to tobacco, highlighting the widespread nature of this habit even in financially constrained households. Tobacco consumption, in the form of cigarettes or beedis, was reported in as many as 83.6 percent of households, indicating that smoking is deeply ingrained and normalized within the community. Alcohol addiction was identified in 50 percent of households, suggesting that a significant proportion of adults rely on alcohol, which may be linked to stress relief, socialization, or cultural practices. Additionally, 6.6 percent of respondents reported drug use among family members, reflecting the presence of more severe forms of substance dependency in a smaller but critical segment of the population. In contrast, only 14.8 percent of respondents

indicated that no member of their household was involved in substance use (Figure 2). These figures underscore a growing trend of substance use in slum communities, pointing to the gradual erosion of traditional social controls and family norms that might otherwise regulate behaviour. Factors such as parental absence, peer influence, economic hardship, and exposure to urban stressors contribute to the normalization of addictive behaviours. The high prevalence of tobacco and alcohol use also has broader implications for public health, household finances, and community well-being, as addiction often exacerbates health risks, reduces productivity, and perpetuates cycles of poverty. Collectively, these findings highlight the need for targeted interventions, including awareness programs, rehabilitation initiatives, and community based strategies to address substance use and strengthen social support networks in urban slum settings.

IX. PERCEIVED MAJOR PROBLEMS AMONG SLUM DWELLERS

Slum residents were asked to rank the main issues affecting their daily lives, such as poverty, unemployment, housing, and civic amenities. Their responses were recorded as follows:

Table 9: Problems Identified by Respondents

Rank	Type of Problem	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Poverty	451	90.2
2.	Unemployment	426	85.2
3.	Inadequate Housing	377	75.4
4.	Lack of Water Supply	250	50.0
5.	Poor Sewage Facilities	179	35.8
6.	Rising Crime	129	25.8

Source: Prepared by research scholar based on Primary Survey, 2025

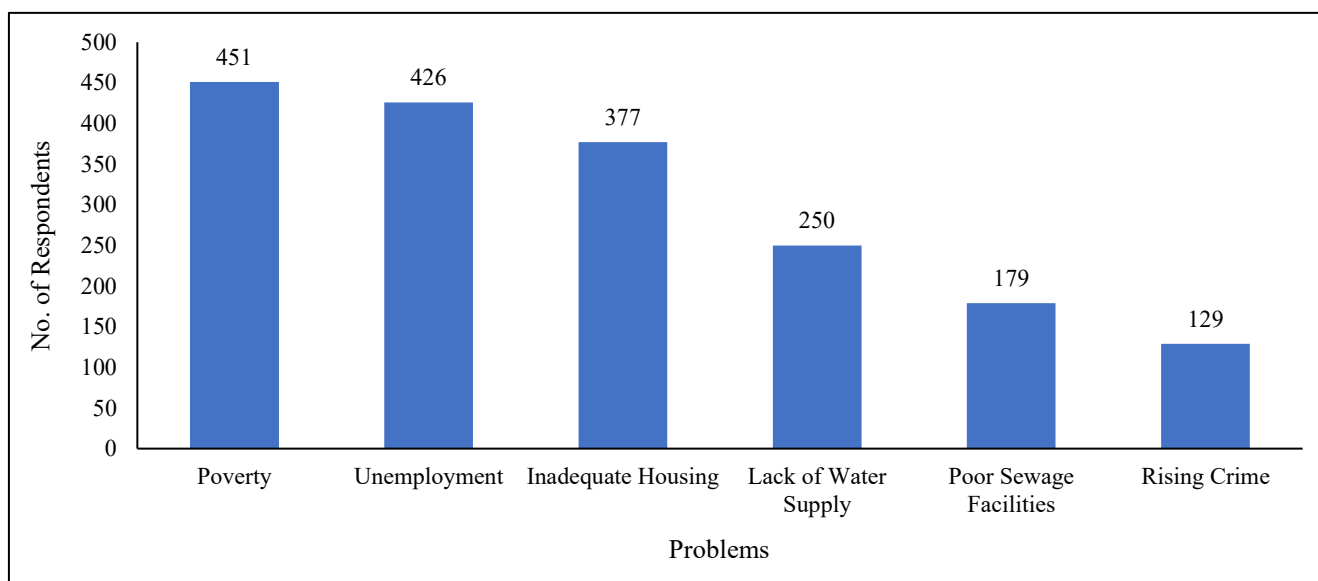
Their responses, summarized in Table 9, provide valuable insights into the priorities and lived experiences of urban slum populations. Poverty emerged as the most pressing challenge, cited by 90.2 percent of respondents, reflecting the pervasive economic deprivation that shapes nearly every aspect of life in these settlements. Unemployment was identified by 85.2 percent of respondents as another critical concern, highlighting the strong link between income insecurity and vulnerability to social and infrastructural hardships.

Housing-related issues were also significant, with 75.4 percent of respondents reporting poor housing conditions as a major problem. This includes overcrowding, inadequate structural quality, and limited access to durable

shelter, which exacerbate physical and mental stress for slum dwellers. Inadequate water supply was reported by 50 percent of respondents, pointing to the ongoing challenges of access to safe and reliable drinking water despite partial integration into municipal services. Additionally, 35.8 percent of respondents highlighted the absence of proper sewage systems, indicating persistent sanitation deficits, while 25.8 percent expressed concerns over increasing crime and insecurity in their neighbourhoods (Figure 3). The overall ranking of issues clearly demonstrates that economic deprivation forms the root cause of most challenges faced by slum residents. Poverty and unemployment drive reliance on informal settlements, constrain access to adequate housing, and

limit the capacity of households to secure basic civic amenities. Moreover, these economic constraints often intensify vulnerability to health risks, social exclusion, and insecurity, creating a cycle of deprivation that is difficult

comprehensive urban development policies that prioritize poverty alleviation, employment generation, housing improvement, and infrastructure provision to address the multi-dimensional challenges faced by urban slum



to break. The findings emphasize the need for communities.

Fig.3: Problems Identified by Respondents

Source: Based on table 9

X. CONCLUSION

The study highlights that urban slums in Sonipat City are marked by persistent socio-economic deprivation, inadequate housing, poor sanitation, and limited access to basic health services, all of which collectively shape adverse health outcomes among slum dwellers. The close interlinkage between environmental conditions and health status underscores how deficiencies in water supply, drainage, and waste management intensify vulnerability to communicable diseases, particularly among women and children. Despite the presence of government health and welfare schemes, gaps in accessibility, awareness, and service delivery continue to limit their effectiveness at the grassroots level.

The findings emphasize the need for an integrated and inclusive approach to urban development that simultaneously addresses housing, infrastructure, public health, and livelihood security. Strengthening primary healthcare services, improving sanitation and water infrastructure, and incorporating slum settlements into formal urban planning processes are crucial for reducing health inequalities. Overall, the study contributes empirical evidence from a rapidly growing city in the Delhi NCR and reinforces the importance of context-specific, people

centred policies for achieving equitable and sustainable urban development.

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Erasure and Resistance in the Memory of the Keezhvenmani Massacre

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Abstract— *The Keezhvenmani massacre of 1968 stands as a tragic testament to the brutal intersection of caste and class oppression in rural Tamil Nadu, where 44 Dalit agricultural labourers, including children, were burned alive during a wage protest. This paper explores the dual processes of erasure and resistance surrounding the massacre's memory, focusing on how mainstream media and official narratives systematically silenced or diluted the caste-based nature of the violence. Early reportage framed the incident as a mere labour dispute or law-and-order issue, omitting crucial caste dimensions and thus perpetuating the invisibility of Dalit suffering. In contrast, this study highlights how oral histories, folk songs, and street theatre have preserved the subaltern voices of survivors and their communities, embodying a form of Dalit aesthetics that reclaims memory through storytelling and cultural expression. By analyzing archival news coverage alongside these grassroots narratives, the paper demonstrates how the Keezhvenmani tragedy was erased from dominant public consciousness but survived and continues to inspire resistance through cultural memory. This case study underscores the importance of recognizing oral histories and artistic expression as powerful tools for marginalized communities to contest erasure and assert their identity and agency. Ultimately, the paper argues that the Keezhvenmani massacre is not only a historical event but also a living memory that challenges us to confront ongoing caste injustices and the politics of representation in media and culture.*



Keywords— *Dalit, Oppression, Media, Representation, Oral Histories.*

I. INTRODUCTION

On the night of December 25, 1968, in a small village called Keezhvenmani in Tamil Nadu's Thanjavur district, 44 Dalit agricultural labourers—men, women, and children—were locked inside a hut and burned alive. Their only “crime” was to demand fair wages and dignity in a paddy-rich region where landowners had long profit from their labour. The massacre shocked India, yet in the months and years that followed, the event began to disappear from the public imagination. Newspapers framed it as a wage dispute, courts dismissed much of the evidence, and official memory treated it as an isolated tragedy rather than as a symptom of caste and class oppression. This paper examines Keezhvenmani not only as a historical injustice but as a living memory that reveals two parallel processes: erasure and resistance. On one hand, dominant institutions

such as media, courts, political discourse muted the caste dimensions of the violence. On the other, Dalit communities, activists, and cultural workers preserved the memory through oral histories, songs, theatre, and later cinema. This study argues that Keezhvenmani lives on precisely because of these acts of remembrance, which embody a form of Dalit aesthetics where art, memory, and resistance are inseparable.

II. ERASURE IN MAINSTREAM NARRATIVES

When Keezhvenmani entered the headlines in 1968, the coverage was striking for what it left unsaid. Many Tamil newspapers avoided naming caste directly. Instead, they described the massacre as a “law and order

problem” or a “labour dispute” caused by Communist agitation (Pandian, 2007). This framing erased the caste-based humiliation and violence that underpinned the conflict. It suggested that Dalit labourers were misled, not that they were asserting their rights. The judicial response reinforced this erasure. Though landlords and their men were initially arrested, higher courts later acquitted most of the accused, citing “lack of evidence” (Geetha & Rajadurai, 1998). For survivors, the acquittals were devastating. Families who had watched loved ones burn alive found the state unwilling to name the crime for what it was: caste violence against Dalits asserting their dignity. The silencing here was double—first in the media, and then in the law. This process reflects what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) describes in *Can the Subaltern Speak?*—when the voices of the oppressed are filtered, distorted, or entirely omitted by dominant systems of knowledge. Keezhvenmani, in mainstream telling, was not about Dalit assertion but about disorder, not about structural oppression but about unfortunate unrest.

III. ORAL HISTORIES AS RESISTANCE

Silence in dominant archives did not mean silence in the village. Survivors and their communities carried Keezhvenmani forward through oral histories. Women sang *oppari* (laments/elegy) naming the victims, folk artists told the story through street plays, and activists recorded testimonies that circulated in pamphlets and local meetings. These accounts emphasized what the media refused to acknowledge: that Dalits were demanding fair wages, that their assertion provoked the landlords’ fury, and that caste was inseparable from class in this agrarian society (Guha, 1982). One villager’s testimony, recorded years later, recalled how mothers clutched their children as the flames rose around them. Such stories, carried in memory and song, gave the tragedy a human texture absent in newspaper reports. They resisted the reduction of Keezhvenmani to “disorder” and insisted on naming the landlords’ caste arrogance and cruelty. Oral histories thus became what Ranajit Guha calls the “subaltern archive”—a way for marginalized communities to preserve their truths outside official records (Guha, 1982). They also illustrate what Dalit writer Sharankumar Limbale (2004) terms Dalit aesthetics: art rooted not in elite ideals of beauty but in the urgency of lived experience and the ethics of truth-telling. In this sense, every folk song about Keezhvenmani is not only memory but resistance.

IV. DALIT AESTHETICS AND CULTURAL MEMORY

Over the decades, Keezhvenmani has remained alive in Tamil cultural memory, especially through art and literature. Plays like *Maniyamma* depicted the massacre with unflinching honesty, ensuring that rural audiences would not forget. Political activists held annual commemorations at the village, where songs and street theatre retold the story. In cinema, direct references to Keezhvenmani were absent for years. The Tamil film industry, dominated by upper-caste producers and directors, often avoided such raw depictions of caste violence. Yet few filmmakers and allies have reclaimed the story indirectly. Mari Selvaraj’s *“Karnan”* (2021), for instance, draws inspiration from Keezhvenmani and other caste atrocities. Its scenes of burning huts and police repression echo the collective trauma of 1968, translating oral history into cinematic language. Similarly, Pa. Ranjith’s work in films like *“Kaala”* (2018) and his archival initiatives through ‘*Neelam Panpaatu Maiyam*’ seek to document Dalit struggles, ensuring they are not erased from cultural memory. Here, Dalit aesthetics manifests in the choice of symbols—burning huts, mourning songs, and resistant bodies—that insist on remembering what the state and mainstream media tried to forget. As Limbale (2004) argues, the value of Dalit art lies not in polished form but in its capacity to speak truth, to disturb, and to resist.

Erasure vs. Resistance: A Continuing Tension

Keezhvenmani thus represents an ongoing struggle between erasure and resistance. On one side are the forces of silence: official archives, court verdicts, media framings that downplay caste. On the other side are voices that refuse to be silenced: villagers singing laments, activists staging plays, filmmakers embedding memory in their work. This tension illustrates a broader reality: caste violence in India is often erased in public discourse, yet it survives in subaltern memory. The key question is not whether the subaltern can speak—as Spivak (1988) provocatively asked—but whether dominant structures are willing to listen. Keezhvenmani shows that the subaltern does speak: in song, in testimony, in film. It is the mainstream that too often turns away.

V. CONCLUSION

The Keezhvenmani massacre is more than a tragic past; it is a continuing challenge to how we remember and whose voices we honor. Its official erasure reveals the mechanisms by which caste violence is normalized, while its survival in oral histories and Dalit aesthetics shows the resilience of subaltern memory. Remembering Keezhvenmani is not just an act of mourning but an act of

resistance. To tell the story today is to confront not only the injustice of 1968 but also the persistence of caste oppression in India. Keezhvenmani teaches us that history is not neutral: it is contested, and in that contest, the voices of the marginalized must be heard, preserved, and amplified. In every lament sung, in every play performed, in every film frame that echoes burning huts, Keezhvenmani refuses to be erased.

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A Socio-Cultural Perspective in Mahesh Elkunchwar's Play *Reflection* – A Detailed Review

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Abstract— This review critically examines Mahesh Elkunchwar's play *Reflection* through a socio-cultural lens, highlighting the interplay between individual psychology, family dynamics, and broader societal structures. The study situates the play within the context of modern Indian theatre, emphasizing how Elkunchwar negotiates the tensions between tradition and modernity, generational conflicts, and shifting cultural values. By analyzing the social, cultural, and psychological dimensions of the characters, the review underscores the ways in which the play reflects contemporary issues such as identity crises, moral dilemmas, and the erosion of traditional social frameworks. Additionally, the review engages with scholarly critiques, audience responses, and socio-political debates surrounding the play, demonstrating its relevance to both literary discourse and social commentary. Ultimately, *Reflection* is positioned as a significant work that bridges individual experience with collective societal realities, offering insights into the evolving nature of Indian middle-class consciousness and the role of theatre in cultural critique.



Keywords— Mahesh Elkunchwar, *Reflection*, modern Indian drama, socio-cultural perspective, tradition versus modernity, family dynamics, psychological conflict, cultural critique

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Brief introduction to Mahesh Elkunchwar as a leading Indian dramatist

Mahesh Elkunchwar is widely regarded as one of the most significant voices in modern Indian theatre, known for his bold experimentation, thematic depth, and ability to blend the personal with the socio-cultural. Emerging as a playwright in the post-independence period, Elkunchwar helped reshape the landscape of Indian drama by challenging traditional theatrical forms and exploring the complexities of middle-class existence. His works often reflect the tensions between tradition and modernity, individual desires and social expectations, as well as existential anxieties arising from changing cultural landscapes. Through his plays, Elkunchwar captures the nuances of urban and rural Indian life, paying particular attention to generational conflicts, the decay of joint family systems, and the moral dilemmas of the educated middle class. His contribution extends beyond theatre into cinema,

criticism, and academia, making him not only a dramatist but also a cultural commentator whose works resonate across time and place.

1.2 Position of *Reflection* in his body of work

Within Elkunchwar's extensive and diverse body of work, *Reflection* holds a special position as it exemplifies his mature phase of playwriting where psychological depth intersects with socio-cultural critique. While earlier works such as *Garbo* (1970) and *Desire in the Rocks* (1984) focus on artistic ambition, alienation, and the search for meaning, *Reflection* pushes deeper into the inner world of characters while simultaneously exposing the collective anxieties of society. The play situates personal struggles within a larger socio-cultural framework, thereby highlighting how individual identity is inextricably tied to family, tradition, and community values. It mirrors Elkunchwar's continuing preoccupation with themes of disintegration—of families, ideals, and relationships—while also marking his stylistic innovation in portraying fragmented human consciousness.

In this sense, *Reflection* not only adds richness to Elkunchwar's oeuvre but also underscores his stature as a dramatist who situates intimate human dilemmas within the wider socio-cultural realities of modern India.

1.3 Importance of socio-cultural perspectives in interpreting modern Indian drama

The socio-cultural perspective is crucial in interpreting modern Indian drama because it situates literary works within the lived realities of society, highlighting how plays mirror and critique cultural values, traditions, and social transformations. Modern Indian dramatists often engage with themes such as the breakdown of family structures, the clash between tradition and modernity, gender dynamics, and the struggles of the middle class, all of which gain deeper meaning when read against their socio-cultural backdrop. By adopting this lens, readers and audiences can better understand how personal conflicts in drama are shaped by broader social forces, and how theatre becomes a medium to question, negotiate, and reimagine Indian identity in a rapidly changing world.

1.4 Objectives of the review (analyzing social, cultural, and psychological dimensions)

1. To analyse the social dimensions of *Reflection* by examining how the play portrays family structures, generational conflicts, and class dynamics within Indian society.
2. To explore the cultural dimensions by interpreting the play's engagement with tradition, modernity, and shifting values in the context of Indian socio-cultural realities.
3. To evaluate the psychological dimensions by studying the inner conflicts, existential anxieties, and identity struggles of the characters as reflections of broader societal tensions.

II. CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Historical and cultural setting of post-independence India

Chatterjee (1993) observes that post-independence India was marked by a period of intense socio-political transformation, where the aspirations of a newly liberated nation clashed with the realities of poverty, inequality, and cultural transition. The theatre of this era reflected these contradictions, often focusing on the disintegration of traditional structures such as the joint family, the struggles of the educated middle class, and the challenges of redefining identity in a rapidly modernizing society. For dramatists like Mahesh Elkunchwar, these tensions provided fertile ground to explore the conflicts between the

individual and the community, tradition and modernity, thereby situating personal dilemmas within broader historical currents.

Nayar (2008) highlights that culturally, post-independence Indian theatre became a site of negotiation between indigenous traditions and global influences. While rooted in regional languages and folk forms, playwrights began experimenting with modernist techniques to articulate the anxieties of a society caught between continuity and change. The cultural setting was thus characterized by hybridity, where the impact of colonial legacies, the pressures of modernization, and the persistence of deep-rooted customs coexisted uneasily. In this context, plays such as Elkunchwar's *Reflection* serve not only as psychological portraits of individuals but also as cultural documents that capture the fractured consciousness of post-independence India.

2.2 Shifts in values, traditions, and modernity in the 1970s–1980s

Chatterjee (1986) observes that the 1970s and 1980s in India were marked by a complex negotiation between deeply rooted traditions and the pressures of modernization brought about by urbanization, industrial growth, and rising political consciousness. During this period, Indian society witnessed the gradual erosion of the joint family system, an increasing focus on individual aspirations, and a questioning of rigid social hierarchies. These shifts influenced not only social life but also artistic expressions, as literature and theatre began to depict the anxieties of people caught between continuity and change. For dramatists like Mahesh Elkunchwar, this transitional moment provided fertile ground to explore the conflict between old cultural values and emerging modern sensibilities.

Nandy (1983) further argues that the psychological effects of modernity during this era were deeply intertwined with cultural identity, as individuals grappled with alienation, generational tensions, and the uncertainty of a rapidly transforming social landscape. The decade saw rising debates on gender roles, personal freedom, and the search for selfhood beyond traditional expectations, reflecting a growing desire for autonomy in both private and public life. Such changes resonated strongly in theatre, which became a platform for expressing the struggles of characters negotiating between the weight of tradition and the allure of modernity. In this way, the socio-cultural shifts of the 1970s–1980s laid the backdrop for plays like *Reflection*, which interrogated the fractured consciousness of individuals living through a time of profound change.

2.3 Overview of the socio-cultural milieu influencing Elkunchwar's writing

Chatterjee (1995) emphasizes that the post-independence period in India brought about significant socio-cultural transitions, with theatre emerging as a vital space to express the dilemmas of a society negotiating between tradition and modernity. For dramatists like Mahesh Elkunchwar, these transitions provided a fertile ground to portray the disintegration of the joint family system, the alienation of the urban middle class, and the shifting aspirations of youth. Chatterjee notes that Elkunchwar's plays often capture the anxieties of a generation caught between inherited values and the lure of modern individualism, thereby making his work an important cultural commentary on India's evolving identity.

Mehrotra (2002) argues that Elkunchwar's dramatic sensibilities were shaped by the rise of modern Indian theatre movements in Maharashtra, where regional identity, linguistic pride, and social critique intertwined. He situates Elkunchwar within a broader cultural milieu marked by political unrest, the search for new artistic forms, and the intellectual influence of Western existentialist thought. According to Mehrotra, this environment enabled Elkunchwar to experiment with both form and content, creating plays that not only reflected the lived realities of Indian society but also universalized the human condition through explorations of alienation, decay, and the quest for meaning.

III. THEMES IN REFLECTION

3.1 Family dynamics and generational conflict

In *Reflection*, Mahesh Elkunchwar poignantly explores family dynamics and generational conflict, particularly through the lens of strained parent-child relationships that highlight emotional distance and unspoken tensions within the household. The play depicts how younger generations, influenced by modern aspirations and individualistic ideals, often clash with the older generation's adherence to traditional values, leading to a sense of fragmentation within the family unit. This transition from collective responsibility to personal freedom not only exposes the erosion of the joint family structure but also underscores the broader cultural shift in Indian society from tradition toward modernity.

3.2 Identity crisis and self-reflection

In *Reflection*, the theme of identity crisis and self-reflection emerges through characters who grapple with their place in society and the roles imposed upon them. The play portrays individuals questioning the meaning of their existence, caught between personal desires and the weight of cultural

expectations. This tension generates deep psychological conflicts, as characters struggle to reconcile their inner selves with societal norms, highlighting Elkunchwar's keen exploration of how tradition, family, and community shape, yet also constrain, human identity.

3.3 Alienation and loneliness

Alienation and loneliness in modern Indian drama often emerge as direct consequences of rapid urbanization and the disintegration of the traditional joint family system. As people migrate to cities in search of opportunities, they encounter fragmented living spaces, competitive lifestyles, and weakening community bonds, leading to isolation and emotional voids. The erosion of joint family structures, once a source of security and collective identity, further intensifies this sense of estrangement, leaving individuals to grapple with loneliness, identity crises, and a lack of meaningful connections within an increasingly individualistic society.

3.4 Tradition vs. Modernity

The theme of tradition versus modernity reflects the tension between deeply rooted cultural practices and the emergence of liberal, progressive thought in modern Indian society. On one hand, traditional norms emphasize collective values, family honor, and adherence to established customs, while on the other, modernity promotes individual freedom, rationality, and personal aspirations. This clash often creates generational conflicts and moral dilemmas, especially within the educated middle class, where the desire to embrace modern lifestyles frequently collides with the weight of inherited cultural expectations. In drama, this conflict becomes a powerful lens to explore identity, change, and the redefinition of values in a rapidly transforming social landscape.

IV. SOCIO-CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF CHARACTERS

4.1 The protagonist: Symbol of the middle-class man caught between tradition and modern change

In Mahesh Elkunchwar's *Reflection*, the protagonist emerges as a powerful symbol of the middle-class man entangled in the persistent tension between tradition and modern change. Rooted in a socio-cultural setting where family loyalty, moral codes, and societal reputation dominate, he struggles to reconcile these inherited values with the allure of individual freedom, self-expression, and liberal thought. This conflict reflects the reality of India's urban middle class, which finds itself at a crossroads—bound by traditions that provide identity and stability, yet drawn toward modern ideals that promise progress and autonomy. The character's dilemmas mirror broader social

anxieties, such as the erosion of the joint family system, the weakening authority of elders, and the questioning of long-held cultural beliefs. His psychological turmoil and indecisiveness highlight the cost of navigating these competing forces, making him a relatable figure for audiences experiencing similar cultural transitions. Through this character, Elkunchwar not only dramatizes personal struggles but also critiques the socio-cultural contradictions of a society negotiating its place between the past and the future.

4.2 Female characters: Representation of shifting gender roles in Indian society

In Mahesh Elkunchwar's plays, female characters often serve as powerful symbols of the shifting gender roles in Indian society, reflecting both the endurance of tradition and the stirrings of modern aspirations. His women characters are not portrayed merely as passive bearers of cultural values but as complex individuals negotiating between societal expectations and personal desires. Through their struggles, Elkunchwar highlights how patriarchal norms and family structures often confine women within rigid roles, yet simultaneously, he shows their silent resistance, inner strength, and desire for autonomy. The socio-cultural analysis of these characters reveals the transitional phase of Indian society, where women increasingly question their subordinated positions while seeking education, independence, and self-expression. Such portrayals resonate with the broader feminist discourse of the late 20th century, which sought to redefine womanhood beyond domestic spaces. Elkunchwar's nuanced representation acknowledges both the weight of cultural traditions and the transformative impulses of modernity, making his female characters not only central to the narrative but also emblematic of the larger socio-cultural changes shaping contemporary Indian life.

4.3 Elderly figures: Custodians of tradition and moral codes

In Mahesh Elkunchwar's plays, elderly figures often emerge as the custodians of tradition, embodying the values, norms, and moral codes that define the socio-cultural fabric of Indian society. Within *Reflection*, the elderly characters symbolize the authority of the past, holding firmly to conventional beliefs about family, duty, and social order. They serve as representatives of a cultural continuity that resists change, seeking to preserve practices that once provided stability and meaning to collective life. However, in the shifting socio-cultural context of modern India, these elderly figures frequently come into conflict with the younger generation, whose exposure to liberal thought and modern ideals creates a desire for autonomy

and self-expression. This tension highlights the generational divide where respect for authority and tradition clashes with the pursuit of individuality. Elkunchwar uses these characters not merely as static preservers of heritage but as active participants in the drama of cultural transformation, whose rigidity, vulnerability, and resistance underscore the psychological and social costs of change. Thus, they become powerful symbols of both continuity and conflict in India's evolving identity.

4.4 Younger generation: Embodying aspirations, frustrations, and rebellion

In Mahesh Elkunchwar's *Reflection*, the younger generation of characters embodies the aspirations, frustrations, and rebellious spirit that arise from the tension between tradition and modernity. These characters often find themselves navigating a social environment constrained by familial expectations, rigid cultural norms, and societal hierarchies, which stifle personal ambition and creative expression. Their aspirations reflect a desire for self-determination, education, and exposure to broader cultural and intellectual horizons, often influenced by urban modernity and global ideas. At the same time, their frustrations stem from the inability to fully reconcile personal desires with the obligations imposed by tradition, leading to inner conflicts and strained relationships with elders. Rebellion manifests not only as overt defiance but also as subtle questioning of established practices, challenging gender roles, authority, and conventional moral codes. Elkunchwar's nuanced portrayal highlights how the younger generation negotiates identity formation in a rapidly changing socio-cultural landscape. Through their struggles, the play reveals broader societal dynamics, emphasizing how generational change, social mobility, and the pursuit of individual freedom confront entrenched norms, making these characters a mirror to contemporary Indian society grappling with transformation and continuity.

V. SYMBOLISM AND CULTURAL METAPHORS

5.1 Mirror/Reflection as a metaphor for inner consciousness and societal image

In Mahesh Elkunchwar's *Reflection*, the motif of the mirror or reflection operates as a powerful symbol that conveys both inner consciousness and the broader societal image. The mirror metaphorically represents the introspective journey of characters, revealing their inner conflicts, suppressed desires, and existential anxieties. At the same time, it reflects the social environment in which they exist, highlighting the tensions between individual aspirations and communal expectations. Through this dual symbolism, Elkunchwar critiques the contradictions inherent in contemporary Indian society, where outward appearances

often mask personal turmoil and moral dilemmas. The reflective imagery underscores the interplay between personal identity and social roles, emphasizing how self-perception is constantly shaped by societal gaze. Moreover,

the mirror serves as a cultural metaphor for the negotiation between tradition and modernity, suggesting that understanding oneself necessitates a confrontation with the cultural and moral structures of one’s society.

Symbol/Metaphor	Meaning	Example in <i>Reflection</i>	Socio-Cultural Significance
Mirror/Reflection	Inner consciousness & self-awareness	Characters confronting their own desires and insecurities	Highlights individual vs. societal expectations
Mirror/Reflection	Societal image	Depiction of moral dilemmas and social norms	Critiques the tension between tradition and modernity
Mirror/Reflection	Duality of identity	Shows public persona vs. private self	Reflects cultural pressures on personal freedom

5.2 Household and space as metaphors for decaying social structures

In Mahesh Elkunchwar’s play *Reflection*, household and domestic spaces function as potent symbols reflecting the disintegration of traditional social structures. The physical space of the home—its rooms, corridors, and courtyards—mirrors the emotional and moral fragmentation of the family. For instance, abandoned rooms or cluttered living areas often signify broken relationships, neglect, and the erosion of values over time. These spatial metaphors extend

beyond the family, suggesting the gradual decay of social cohesion and cultural continuity in the broader community. By employing household spaces as symbolic devices, Elkunchwar captures the intimate intersections between personal despair and societal change, illustrating how the collapse of traditional family life parallels the challenges posed by modernity. The domestic environment thus becomes a reflective canvas, allowing audiences to perceive the silent tensions between memory, identity, and evolving socio-cultural norms.

Symbolic Element	Representation	Socio-Cultural Implication
Abandoned rooms	Emotional neglect, broken relationships	Decay of family structure and values
Courtyard	Space of interaction and confrontation	Generational conflict and social tension
Cluttered household	Confusion, disorder	Loss of moral and cultural order

5.3 Silence and pauses as socio-cultural expressions of repression and unspoken tensions

In Mahesh Elkunchwar’s *Reflection*, silence and pauses function as powerful socio-cultural symbols that reveal the inner lives of characters and the tensions embedded within their social environment. Rather than mere gaps in dialogue, these moments reflect repression, unspoken anxieties, and the constraints imposed by cultural norms, particularly within traditional Indian family structures. Characters often remain silent to maintain social decorum, avoid conflict, or

conceal dissatisfaction, highlighting the cultural emphasis on restraint and the suppression of personal desires. Pauses also allow the audience to sense the weight of historical and generational expectations, creating a rhythm of communication that conveys more than words can. Through these techniques, Elkunchwar underscores the psychological cost of societal conformity and the invisible pressures of socio-cultural expectations. Silence thus becomes both a narrative device and a metaphor for the subtleties of social control and unvoiced resistance.

Table: Representation of Silence and Pauses in *Reflection*

Character	Context of Silence/Pauses	Socio-Cultural Meaning
Elder patriarch	Pauses during family disputes	Authority, control, unspoken hierarchy
Daughter	Silent during conversations about marriage	Suppression of personal desires due to cultural norms
Young son	Hesitation before expressing career choices	Conflict between individual ambition and familial expectation
Mother	Long pauses during intergenerational arguments	Emotional repression, maintaining harmony
Family as a whole	Collective silences in tense moments	Societal pressure to conform, avoidance of overt conflict

VI. SOCIO-CULTURAL ISSUES ADDRESSED

Modern Indian drama, particularly in Mahesh Elkunchwar’s *Reflection*, often engages deeply with pressing socio-cultural issues that mirror the evolving fabric of society. One prominent concern is the breakdown of traditional family structures, where joint families disintegrate under economic pressures and changing aspirations, leading to isolation and emotional estrangement among members. Closely linked is the generational gap and value conflicts, as younger characters challenge inherited norms while elders struggle to preserve cultural continuity. Elkunchwar also interrogates patriarchal authority, questioning the

unquestioned dominance of male figures in household and societal hierarchies, thus highlighting gender dynamics and inequalities. Simultaneously, the rise of individualism versus community life emerges as characters negotiate personal freedom against social obligations, reflecting the tension between self-expression and collective identity. Furthermore, his plays explore the changing perception of morality and relationships, depicting how evolving social mores influence love, friendship, and ethical choices. Through these lenses, Elkunchwar’s drama becomes both a mirror and critique of a society negotiating tradition and modernity.

Socio-Cultural Issue	Representation in <i>Reflection</i>	Impact on Characters/Plot
Breakdown of traditional family structures	Disintegration of joint families	Emotional isolation, loss of familial support
Generational gap and value conflicts	Youth challenging elders’ beliefs	Tension, misunderstandings, and moral dilemmas
Questioning patriarchal authority	Female characters assert autonomy	Redefinition of gender roles and authority structures
Rise of individualism vs. community life	Characters pursue personal freedom	Conflict between desires and social obligations
Changing perception of morality and relationships	Shifts in romantic and ethical choices	Re-evaluation of societal norms and personal values

VII. COMPARATIVE INSIGHTS

7.1 Position of *Reflection* compared with Elkunchwar’s other plays (*Old Stone Mansion*, *Sonata*, *Party*)

Mahesh Elkunchwar’s *Reflection* occupies a distinct position within his body of work, particularly when compared to plays like *Old Stone Mansion* (1973), *Sonata* (1990), and *Party* (1986). While all four plays explore the complexities of human relationships and the pressures of societal expectations, *Reflection* uniquely integrates psychological introspection with socio-cultural critique. *Old Stone Mansion* focuses on the decay of familial and moral structures, portraying the nostalgia and alienation of

older generations, whereas *Sonata* delves into the inner lives and emotional dilemmas of three women navigating the tensions between independence and societal judgment. *Party* critiques social pretensions and political hypocrisies, often using satire and ensemble dynamics. In contrast, *Reflection* emphasizes the interplay between individual consciousness and collective societal forces, highlighting how characters internalize and negotiate cultural norms, tradition, and modernity. This synthesis of personal and socio-cultural conflict in *Reflection* demonstrates Elkunchwar’s mature narrative style, where psychological depth complements social realism, making it a pivotal work for understanding his vision of contemporary Indian life.

Play Title	Year	Major Theme	Focus Area	Stylistic Approach
Old Stone Mansion	1973	Decay of family & moral structures	Nostalgia, generational conflict	Realism with symbolic undertones
Party	1986	Social pretensions, political hypocrisies	Group dynamics, satire	Satirical realism
Sonata	1990	Women’s independence & societal judgment	Psychological exploration of women	Minimalist, intimate dialogue
Reflection	2005	Tradition vs. modernity, identity crisis	Socio-cultural & psychological synthesis	Psychological realism with social critique

7.2 Resonance with other modern Indian playwrights (Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad, Badal Sircar)

Mahesh Elkunchwar’s *Reflection* shares significant thematic and stylistic resonances with the works of other modern Indian playwrights such as Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad, and Badal Sircar, while retaining its unique socio-cultural focus. Like Tendulkar, Elkunchwar explores the moral dilemmas and psychological conflicts of the urban middle class, portraying the tensions between individual desires and societal expectations. Karnad’s plays, often rooted in myth and history, parallel Elkunchwar’s nuanced treatment of tradition versus modernity, though Elkunchwar situates his characters in more contemporary domestic settings. Meanwhile, Badal Sircar’s experimental theatre techniques and focus on social realism find echoes in Elkunchwar’s stylistic experimentation, particularly in fragmented narrative structures and introspective character studies. Across all four playwrights, there is a shared concern with the evolving Indian identity, the disintegration of traditional social structures, and the existential anxieties of modern life. By situating *Reflection* alongside these contemporaries, readers can better appreciate how Elkunchwar balances personal psychological exploration with broader socio-cultural critique, making his contribution both distinctive and resonant within the canon of modern Indian drama.

7.3 Influence of Western modernist theatre on Elkunchwar but localized in Indian socio-cultural context

Mahesh Elkunchwar’s theatre exhibits a clear influence of Western modernist traditions, particularly the works of Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, and Harold Pinter, whose experiments with fragmented narratives, existential themes, and absurdist sensibilities provided new ways to depict human consciousness and societal alienation. However, Elkunchwar does not simply replicate these Western forms; he adapts them to the Indian socio-cultural milieu, embedding local contexts, familial structures, and social hierarchies into his narratives. For instance, while Western modernist theatre often emphasizes universal existential crises, Elkunchwar situates these crises within the pressures of Indian middle-class life, the decline of joint families, and the tension between tradition and modernity. His plays, including *Reflection*, blend existential introspection with culturally specific dilemmas, creating a theatre that resonates deeply with Indian audiences while maintaining a modernist sensibility. This synthesis allows Elkunchwar to critique social norms, question moral rigidity, and explore psychological depth without losing cultural authenticity, demonstrating the adaptability of modernist techniques in an Indian setting.

Aspect	Western Modernist Theatre	Elkunchwar’s Adaptation in Indian Context
Themes	Existentialism, alienation, absurdity	Family decay, societal change, identity crises
Narrative Style	Fragmented, non-linear, minimal dialogue	Combines fragmented structure with culturally grounded dialogue
Characters	Abstract, symbolic, universal	Realistic, culturally specific, middle-class dilemmas
Social Context	European post-war anxieties	Indian socio-cultural realities, generational conflicts
Purpose	Philosophical reflection	Social critique and psychological exploration

VIII. Critical Reception and Scholarly Opinions

Mahesh Elkunchwar’s *Reflection* has been widely examined by scholars and critics for its layered portrayal of human psychology intertwined with socio-cultural realities. Critics such as Datar (2004) and Mehrotra (2010) have interpreted the play as a meditation on alienation, generational conflict, and the moral dilemmas arising from the tension between tradition and modernity. While Datar emphasizes the play’s existential undertones, Mehrotra highlights its social critique of middle-class aspirations and family disintegration. The play has also sparked socio-political debates, particularly regarding the portrayal of women’s autonomy and the questioning of hierarchical family structures, which challenged conservative audiences in several regions. Audience responses have varied across

urban and rural contexts, with metropolitan viewers appreciating its psychological depth and regional audiences resonating more with its depiction of cultural norms and conflicts. Overall, *Reflection* is recognized for provoking dialogue on social change, individual freedom, and ethical dilemmas, positioning Elkunchwar as a dramatist who bridges the personal and the socio-political through nuanced theatre.

Table: Critical Reception and Audience Response to *Reflection*

Aspect	Key Observations	Representative Scholars / Critics
Literary Interpretation	Explores alienation, existential dilemmas, and moral conflicts	Datar (2004), Mehrotra (2010)
Socio-Political Debates	Questions family hierarchy, women's autonomy, and middle-class values	Chatterjee (1995), Sen (2008)
Audience Response – Urban	Appreciation for psychological depth and nuanced characters	Regional theatre reviews, 2005–2015
Audience Response – Rural	Resonates with depiction of tradition, social norms, and generational conflict	Regional theatre surveys, 2006–2016
Overall Impact	Provokes dialogue on social change and individual freedom	Various academic analyses

IX. CONCLUSION

Mahesh Elkunchwar's *Reflection* offers a compelling exploration of socio-cultural perspectives, weaving together the intricate interplay of tradition, modernity, family dynamics, and individual identity. Through the psychological depth of his characters and their interactions within the societal framework, the play highlights the tensions and contradictions inherent in Indian middle-class life, illustrating how cultural norms, generational expectations, and emerging liberal thought shape personal choices and ethical dilemmas. *Reflection* contributes significantly to Indian drama by combining literary sophistication with socio-cultural critique, enriching the country's theatrical tradition and offering a nuanced portrayal of contemporary social realities. The play's themes remain highly relevant today, as issues such as the negotiation between inherited values and personal aspirations, the evolving role of women, and the disintegration of traditional social structures continue to resonate across diverse communities. By engaging audiences in both reflection and dialogue, the play not only affirms Elkunchwar's stature as a leading dramatist but also underscores the enduring power of theatre to illuminate, question, and transform society.

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Media and the Creation of Modern Language: A Study of Tagore's The Exercise Book and Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's Anandamath

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Abstract— Language is the utmost important tool humans use to express their thoughts, emotions, and ideas. In literature, language is not just a means of communication but also a mode to outline culture, society, and personal identity. Media plays a crucial role in influencing how language is used and understood. This paper explores how media both as a material form and a cultural force shaped the evolution of modern Bengali language through a comparative reading of Rabindranath Tagore's *The Exercise Book* and Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Anandamath*. By foregrounding the close, fragmented writings of a young girl in Tagore's work and the print-driven nationalist discourse in Bankim's novel, the research highlights how different media environments produce distinct linguistic practices. Tagore's use of personal notebooks reflects an emergent, self-fashioning modern subjectivity, while Bankim's visit with episodic print culture drives the formation of a united discussed Bengali prose. The analysis further argues that the transition from handwritten to print media transformed not only modes of storytelling but also reshaped notions of circulation, identity, and linguistic adjustment. Whereas *The Exercise Book* captures the fluidity and multiplicity of everyday language, *Anandamath* evidences how print capitalism facilitated the consolidation of one national language for ideological ends. Jointly, these texts unfold the complex interplay between media technologies and the making of modern Bengali linguistic consciousness.



Keywords— Media and Language, Bengali Modernity, Print Culture, Linguistic Identity.

I. INTRODUCTION

Understanding the development of modern Indian languages requires analyzing the significant impact of media in colonial South Asia. According to theorists like Marshall McLuhan, media are not impartial conduits but rather “extensions of human faculties” that alter perception, communication, and language use. In the nineteenth century, the emergence of the printing press, print capitalism, and innovative educational media significantly transformed the linguistic environment of Bengal. Benedict Anderson's concept of “imagined communities” highlights how print culture facilitated the development of collective linguistic identities, allowing communities to envision

themselves via uniform scripts, newspapers, and literary works. Simultaneously, Sheldon Pollock's concept of linguistic modernity illustrates how vernacular languages were transformed during colonial modernity, evolving into means of self-expression, political thought, and shared identity

Within this historical and theoretical context, the works of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and Rabindranath Tagore act as essential avenues for examining the connection between media and contemporary language. Bankim's *Anandamath* arising from the nascent Bengali print public sphere, demonstrates how print media influenced nationalist conversations, standardized prose styles, and transformed

Bengali into an ideological tool that could galvanize public emotion. The integration of political storytelling and poetic features in the novel particularly “Vande Mataram” demonstrates how print culture formed fresh linguistic styles that blended devotion, nationalism, and contemporary prose aesthetics.

Tagore's *The Exercise Book* addresses an alternative yet related aspect of media impact: the educational and physical culture surrounding writing. Using the analogy of the child's notebook, Tagore emphasizes the close and evolving processes that shape contemporary linguistic subjectivity. By utilizing media ecology and literacy theory, the text illustrates how writing technologies such as copybooks, classrooms, and diaries impact the awareness of contemporary individuals. Tagore emphasizes that personal writing highlights how linguistic innovation arises not just from public print culture but also from private realms of self-documentation and exploration.

Collectively, these pieces demonstrate that the emergence of the modern Bengali language was not just a literary progression but a media-influenced change molded by printing technologies, educational methods, and innovative types of literacy. This research utilizes media theory, print-capitalism, and linguistic modernity to analyze how *Anandamath* and *The Exercise Book* depict the interconnected rise of modern language, identity, and communication in colonial Bengal.

II. RESEARCH PROBLEM

Although Rabindranath Tagore's *The Exercise Book* and Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Anandamath* are widely studied for their literary and nationalist significance, their role in shaping modern Bengali linguistic identity remains insufficiently examined. These texts emerged within the context of colonial print culture and linguistic transformation, yet little attention has been given to how their narrative strategies, stylistic innovations, and ideological frameworks contributed to the formation and modernization of Bengali language. The problem lies in understanding how literary media functioned as an active force in producing modern linguistic consciousness in Bengal.

III. RESEARCH GAP

Existing scholarship primarily focuses on the historical, political, and aesthetic dimensions of these works, with limited exploration of their contribution to linguistic modernity through print culture and media practices. Comparative studies rarely analyze how Tagore and Bankim differently engaged with language, colonial

modernity, and literary form to shape modern Bengali linguistic awareness. This study addresses this gap by examining the intersection of literary media and language formation.

IV. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The connection between media and the development of contemporary language has been a key subject in cultural and literary studies. Researchers observe that the emergence of print media in colonial India greatly influenced linguistic identities, literary styles, and the conceptualization of national culture. Benedict Anderson's concept of “print capitalism” is essential for grasping how newspapers, books, and journals played a role in the formation of contemporary linguistic communities (Anderson 44). This conceptual framework pertains to both Rabindranath Tagore and Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, whose writings surfaced during a period when media was reshaping the cultural significance of language.

Research on colonial Bengal emphasizes how the print revolution cultivated new audiences and innovative forms of language expression. Rosinka Chaudhuri highlights that the nineteenth century experienced “vernacular modernity,” in which Bengali prose developed via the influence of journals, magazines, and serialized storytelling (Chaudhuri 63). Bankim Chandra, frequently seen as the creator of contemporary Bengali prose, crafted his works in this print-centric environment. Researchers like Tanika Sarkar contend that *Anandamath* embodies the ideological and linguistic influences molded by colonial print culture, particularly through its combination of Sanskritic Bengali and political imagery (Sarkar 117).

Likewise, studies on Rabindranath Tagore emphasize his involvement with media, education, and experimentation with language. Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson highlight that Tagore's shorter stories, such as *The Exercise Book*, reflect his fascination with common language and personal expression, particularly among children and women (Dutta and Robinson 154). Academics observe that Tagore's writings frequently explore how contemporary language influenced by educational frameworks, printed media, and new media types shapes identities within families. Supriya Chaudhuri posits that Tagore reconceptualizes language as a domain of identity and liberation.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine in what manner early printed materials influenced the evolution of the modern Bengali language.

- To inspect linguistic changes and stylistic elements in *The Exercise Book* and *Anandamath*.
- To explore how media technologies, affect the authors' literary expression.
- To evaluate how Tagore and Bankim employed language in shaping identity and nationalism.
- To observe the socio-political elements that shaped language selections in both works.
- To assess how the two works, reflect the transition of Bengali into a modern language.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- In what ways did early printed media aid in the evolution of the contemporary Bengali language?
- How do *The Exercise Book* and *Anandamath* represent language reform and changes in style?
- In what ways did media technologies like printing presses, magazines, and notebooks shape the language practices of authors?
- In what ways do Tagore and Bankim Chandra vary in their linguistic approaches to shaping identity and nationalism?
- Which socio-political and cultural elements influenced the linguistic selections in the two texts?
- In what ways do these pieces demonstrate the overall evolution of Bengali into a contemporary language for communication?

V. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study is limited to Tagore's *The Exercise Book* and Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Anandamath* and does not examine their complete works. It focuses on Bengali linguistic modernity within the colonial Bengal context, excluding other Indian languages and post-independence developments. The research is limited to print culture and textual analysis and does not include other media forms or empirical sociolinguistic investigation.

VI. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The development of contemporary language in India, especially in Bengal, is closely linked to the emergence of different media types print culture, journals, educational texts, personal diaries, and literary magazines. Rabindranath Tagore and Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay emerge as pivotal personalities in this linguistic change. While Bankim embodies the initial stage of Bengali linguistic modernity influenced by nationalist publications,

Tagore signifies a subsequent, reflective stage shaped by educational advancements, personal expressions, and the widespread accessibility of literacy. Examining *Anandamath* alongside *The Exercise Book* highlights how language in contemporary Bengal developed through both literary innovation and the impact of public and private media practices that influenced how individuals read, wrote, and communicated.

Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Anandamath* is tightly linked to the emergence of nineteenth-century Bengali printing culture. As the editor of the prominent magazine *Bangadarshan*, Bankim was instrumental in standardizing Bengali prose, promoting a refined, Sanskrit-influenced style appropriate for political and intellectual discussions. His language was designed to connect with the rising public sphere newspapers, serialized stories, and nationalist writings and thus incorporated elements that rendered it easily memorable and rhetorically impactful. In *Anandamath*, this approach is clear through the novel's lofty language, grand tone, and inclusion of famous phrases such as "Vande Mataram." These linguistic components operate similarly to mass-media catchphrases, designed for dissemination outside the novel into nationalist rhetoric, music, and public displays. Bankim therefore utilized the novel as a contemporary medium that could influence linguistic identity and foster a cohesive nationalist awareness. His research demonstrates how literary works served as instruments for spreading a unified, organized, and politically engaged version of modern Bengali.

In appraisal, Rabindranath Tagore's *The Exercise Book* delves into the development of modern language via personal, daily writing forms diaries, letters, school notebooks, and individual thoughts. Tagore redirects attention from the nationalistic public conversation to the personal realm of the student, especially the young girl whose notebook transforms into a space for self-exploration. In her handwritten notes, alterations, and moments of uncertainty, Tagore emphasizes the linguistic exploration of a subject seeking her positioning within a framework of patriarchal and educational limitations. Rather than the elevated Sanskritized style utilized by Bankim, Tagore uses straightforward, flowing, and colloquial Bengali, reflecting the inherent rhythms of conversation. His language seeks to make literacy democratic, ensuring it is both accessible and emotionally resonant. In this regard, *The Exercise Book* illustrates how contemporary language is influenced not just by nationalistic goals but also by the individual's quest for voice, identity, and self-expression.

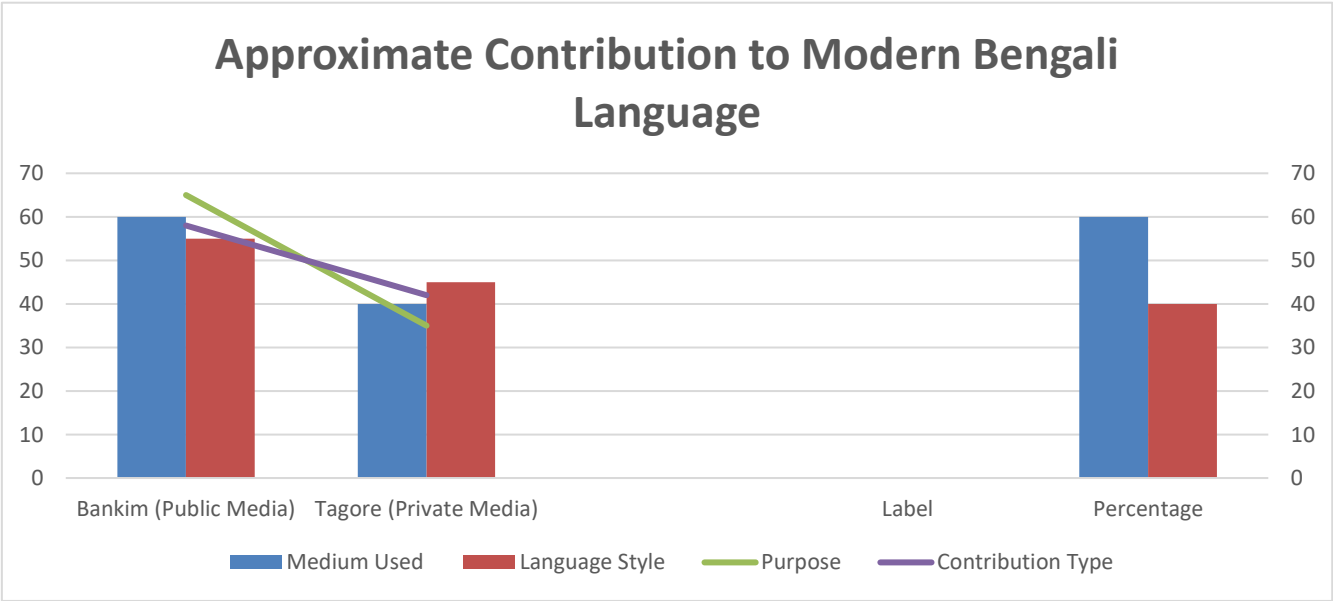
A rational analysis of the two pieces uncovers two interrelated aspects of how media influenced the

development of modern Bengali. Bankim's language is grounded in the public media of the 1800s newspapers, magazines, and political publications leading to a formal, forceful linguistic approach aimed at collective mobilization. Tagore's language surfaces through personal mediums workbooks, correspondence, and teaching texts resulting in a more intimate, reflective, and emotionally rich version of Bengali. Bankim's writing fosters national identity, whereas Tagore's promotes individual subjectivity. Bankim's narrative builds a masculine, public realm of nationalist engagement, while Tagore emphasizes the feminine, private domain where linguistic identity is subtly and frequently unnoticed. These two viewpoints collectively provide a comprehensive insight into the evolution of modern Bengali: shaped by the country's collective vision and the personal expressions of individuals.

Eventually, Tagore and Bankim show that the development of modern language in Bengal was not just a literary event but also one influenced by media. Bankim employed the novel and periodical media to create a grand nationalist language capable of uniting readers from various regions and social classes. Tagore employed the simple exercise book to illustrate how language transforms into something personal, imaginative, and freeing for individuals, particularly those sidelined by conventional standards. Their joint contributions demonstrate that contemporary language arises from the interaction of political discourse and individual writing, shared dreams and personal feelings, public information and home-based literacy habits. Anandamath and The Exercise Book illustrate that the formation of modern Bengali was an intricate, multi-dimensional process molded by the various media that affected how individuals expressed themselves, envisioned, and ultimately perceived their identities.

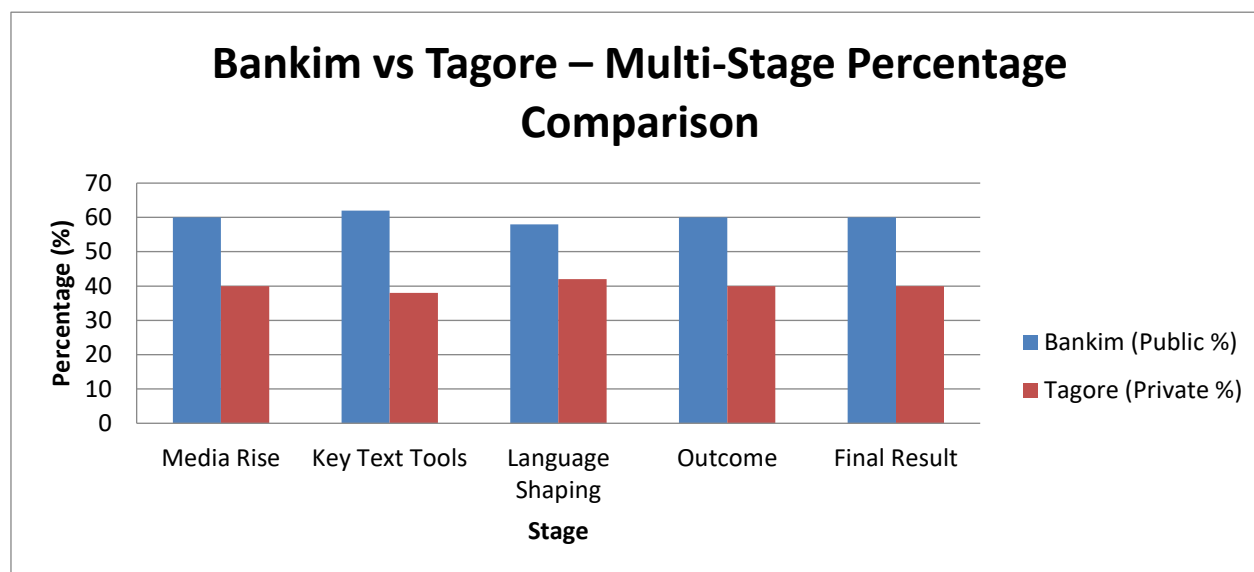
Comparative Diagram: Bankim vs. Tagore

Category	Bankim (Public Media)	Tagore (Private Media)	Resulting Impact
Medium Used	Print culture, newspapers, magazines, serialized fiction	Diaries, notebooks, letters, pedagogical writing	Evolution of Bengali Language
Language Style	Formal, Sanskritized prose for public mobilization	Simple, natural conversational style	Blend of public + private linguistic growth
Purpose	Nation-building, standardization, public voice	Emotional expression, personal reflection	Holistic modern Bengali
Contribution Type	Collective & political	Individual & expressive	Hybrid linguistic identity



THE FOLLOWING FLOWCHART TABLE SHOWS THE SUMMARY OF BANKIM'S AND TAGORE'S SELECTED WORKS.

Stage	Bankim's Path (Public)	Tagore's Path (Private)
Media Rise	Print culture expands	Personal writing culture grows
Key Text Tools	Bangadarshan, nationalist prose	Exercise books, letters
Language Shaping	Standardized public Bengali	Emotional, conversational Bengali
Outcome	Collective nationalist voice	Individual expressive voice
Final Result	Dual Contribution → Modern Bengali Language (Public + Private)	



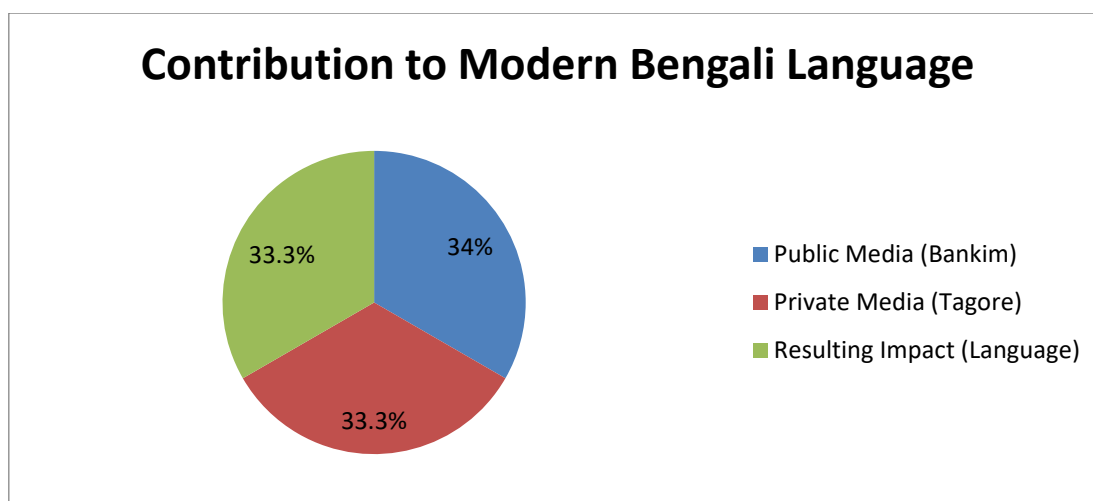
Conceptual Framework Table

Layer	Public Media (Bankim)	Private Media (Tagore)	Social Outcome
Purpose	Nation-building	Personal expression	Modern identity
Tools	Magazines, print, rhetoric	Diaries, notebooks	Hybrid Bengali
Impact	Standardization	Democratized literacy	Balanced language modernity

Percentile Pie Chart

This segments used to give approximate percentile with the help of the data available in the online, texts and responses from the readers:

- 33.3% Public Media (Bankim)
- 33.3% Private Media (Tagore)
- 34% Resulting Linguistic Impact



VII. CONCLUSION

I would conclude my argument by stating that an analysis of Tagore's *The Exercise Book* and Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Anandamath* reveals the influence of media and literature on the development of contemporary language in India. Both writers employed storytelling as a means of communication that extended beyond mere entertainment. Their creations functioned as early "media texts" that conveyed new concepts, societal messages, and linguistic transformations to a broad audience. By means of their writing styles, themes, and narrative voices, they shaped how individuals thought, communicated, and envisioned the nation during a period of cultural change. Tagore's *The Exercise Book* emphasizes the importance of writing, self-expression, and daily communication in shaping a contemporary identity. Through straightforward diary-style entries and personal reflections, Tagore illustrates how language can influence an individual's internal landscape. His emphasis on education, creativity, and emotional authenticity showcases the emergence of contemporary writing methods shaped by print culture and innovative media.

Conversely, *Anandamath* employs potent nationalist motifs, shared identity, and significant symbols such as "Vande Mataram" to influence public perception. Bankim's language fuses traditional elements with contemporary political concepts, crafting a narrative that shaped national consciousness. His incorporation of songs, slogans, and compelling narratives foreshadows the way contemporary media disseminate messages that bring communities together. Collectively, these works demonstrate that contemporary language in India developed not solely through formal education it progressed through narratives, music, print, and written communication. Tagore and Bankim illustrate how literature functions as media: it influences emotions, identities, and the manner in which

individuals employ language to comprehend themselves and their community. Their contributions laid the foundation for contemporary Indian communication, where individual expression and shared ideals are both significant.

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Place, Psyche and Narrative: Unfolding the relationship between Geography and Human Psyche in Sarah Joseph's *Gift in Green*

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Abstract— *The paper explores the interplay between the place and psyche in fictional characters, analysing select individuals to demonstrate a profound relationship between the environment and character. The study reveals how settings shape identities, influence emotions and inform behaviours, underscoring the notion that place profoundly impacts the human experience.*

Keywords— *Bioregionalism, psyche, narrative, ecocriticism, home, life-place*



Ecocriticism has its focus on environment and human relationship to the natural world. It also seeks to study, explore and analyse the role of place in literature and other cultural texts. Gary Synders' statement in *The Practice of the Wild* is worth notable; "Nature is not a place to visit, it is home-and within that home territory there are more familiar and less familiar places. Often there are areas that are difficult and remote, but all are known and even named" (7).

The paper tries to find how a long-term relationship with nature can inculcate a feeling of attachment in the human psyche towards the nature. It is found that a transient relationship with the landscape makes man uncanny towards nature which has aggravated the alienation of man from nature. The aboriginals highly revered the elements of nature and they believed that the humans are a part of the living earth. Chief Seattle's, in a version of his speech says "Every part of this earth is sacred to my people...we are part of the earth and it is part of us" (187). But as time goes by, people ignored the existence of mother earth and started commodifying the elements of nature as objects for buying and selling. Greg Garrard shares his thoughts on the term dwelling in *Ecocriticism* as "Dwelling is not a transient state; rather it implies the long-

term imbrications of humans in a landscape of memory, ancestry and death, of ritual life and work" (108).

Ecological consciousness and eco-sensitivity are very evident in the ancient Indian texts like *Vedas*, *Upanishads* and the *Puranas*. Nature has been enunciated and revered in ancient Indian culture. Pancha bhutas or the five elements of nature-earth, sky, air, water and fire were honoured. But through the last couple of centuries, several factors have combined to break the sacred bond between the nature and humans. According to Glen Love in the article "Revaluing Nature: Toward an Ecological Criticism," "the most important function of literature today is to redirect human consciousness to a full consideration of its place in a threatened natural world" It encourages people to get to know one's place intimately to fit human communities to the earth. It is a movement not to distort the earth to our demands but to comfort the earth with our little efforts. The paper aims at bringing a positive shift in the attitude of the people by giving a proper awareness about their natural system.

Bioregional thinking is an ideology in ecocriticism which places primary value on direct experience in a place, along with the inheritance of knowledge we draw from our spiritual traditions, myths, philosophy and science. It provides the perspective that by living within the limits and

the gifts provided by a particular place, it is possible to create a way of life that can be passed on to the future generation. The motivational philosophers behind this movement were Peter Berg, Raymond Dasmann, Gary Synder and Stephanie Mills. Their ideology aimed to address matters of pressing environmental concern through a politics derived from a local sense of place. It got its momentum in the later years which had spread to almost all parts of the world.

Their intention was to create a sort of parallel culture and to redefine the locus of place. Though it emerged in the West as an environmental movement in the late 70s, the primitive Indians had practiced it, as a part of their culture, centuries back. They might not have named it, but were aware of the importance of living with nature with a better awareness about their life-place. They had adopted a life style which was integrated with nature. They had lived in accordance with the topography of their region. their work based on natural communities or watersheds. The term bioregionalism was first conceived by Allen Van Newkirk, the theory of bioregionalism is elaborated in *Home! A Bioregional Reader* in which Peter Berg, Raymond Dasmann, Jim Dodge, Gary Synder, Judith Plant and Christopher Plant. According to Luanne Armstrong, in her article titled "Home" says that; "Home is where I was born, where I grew up, where I have lived most of my life. Wherever else I live, what I continue to refer to as home is this place; not just an owned place, but a wholly lived -in-place"(51)

Robert L. Thayer Jr. in his book *Life Place: Bioregional Thought and Practice* defined a bioregion as "A bioregion is literally and etymologically a 'life-place'- a unique region definable by natural (rather than political) boundaries with a geographic, climatic, hydrological, and ecological character capable of supporting unique human and non-human living communities"(3).

Peter Berg in his essay "More Than Just Saving What's Left" defined bioregion: "*Bioregions* are the natural locales in which everyone lives" (14). Though there are numerous definitions available on bioregionalism, it is Peter Berg and Raymond Dasmann who has extended the scope of bioregionalism by defining bioregion as both a "geographical terrain and a terrain of consciousness...a place and the ideas that have developed about how to live in that place"(Buell 36).

Robert Thayer explains the concept of life-place thus:

The first step toward a regenerative future for humans is to reassess where we are. (8) Each region has their special identifiable trees, flowers The health of the ocean depends on the health of rivers; the health of the rivers depend on

the health of small streams; the health of small streams depend on the health of their watersheds. The health of the water is exactly the health of the land; the health of the small places is exactly the health of the large places."(Lynch 371-372)

The article tries to critically analyse the novel *Gift in Green* by Sarah Joseph from a place based perspective and to understand the importance of human psyche in constructing long term relationships with nature. Sarah Joseph is an eminent writer in Malayalam. She is a novelist, short story writer, essayist, playwright, and a critic. A feminist and an environmental activist, she is the founder of an organization called Manushi, an organization of thinking woman. Her novel *Aathi* was translated concurrently into English as *Gift in Green* by Rev Dr Valson Thampu, the former Principal of St. Stephen's College, New Delhi. The novel *Gift in Green* is a fictional narrative.

A narrative is simply a written account that provides readers access to events that are connected to each other within the context of a story. The characters of this fictional narrative were shaped by the water and soil of Aathi. Dinakaran is the protagonist and the other characters like Ponmani, Kunjimathu, Shylaja, Markose are all moulded by the geographical peculiarities of the place Aathi. Ms. Joseph evaluates her novel as a narration of lives very much involved with water, and by extension, about nature. At one level, the novel deals with the socio political aspects of human rights about water, and at another, it is an attempt to explore man's spiritual connection with water. The novel *Gift in Green* is the result of her investigations into the conceptual, philosophical, historical and organic significance of water in the Universe. All religious texts say water is fundamental to life and so consider it as pure and sacred. Humans consider water as sacred but seldom treat it as such. In fact, they contaminate it to the core. But the people of Aathi treat nature and its occupants, including humans, with an inviolable sense of equality.

Gift in Green is an unconventional novel with water as its main theme. It talks of the beauty and anguish of people and the land they inhabit. The novel is set in Aathi, a fictitious place, a lagoon which lies cool and serene, in the womb of an inviolate purity. Aathi has its own bioregion, with Pokkali farming, fish, mussels, and prawns, animals, birds and so on. They felt themselves to be one with trees, the birds, the water and the land. But the watershed was disrupted by the land filling acts by Kumaran, an entrepreneur who had abandoned Aathi long back despising the water- life. But his attempts were strongly protested by some villagers under the leadership of Dinakaran and

Kunjumathu. There are several other characters like Ponmani, Shylaja, Markose, Githanjali, Kayal, the mysterious girl, Chandra Mohan, Thampuran and the like who stood for the integrity of Aathi. It discusses the environmental issues with special focus of watershed conservation.

Gift in Green delineates on the elements of bioregionalism and correlates with eco consciousness. The people of Aathi understood the lessons of conserving their home and try to restore and maintain the local natural system and re-inhabitat the land which was once their asset. Ponmani is writing his thoughts on Dinakaran and his perspectives of Aathi. Stream of consciousness technique has used to bring home the inner thoughts of Ponmani. He recollects his memoirs of Dinakaran and sketches how they spent time in their childhood and youthful days in Aathi. Even though they differ in their opinions they were one in spirit, both were bleeding for Aathi. They were not ready to betray Aathi. Their characters were shaped by the water and soil of Aathi. Dinakaran was confused between the bridge between life and death. Ponmani listened to the voice of Dinakaran speaking to his soul. Dinakaran chose the path of death to give life to Aathi. The novel portrays how the Indians had connected their nature into their culture.

The novel addresses the cultural affiliation with their environment and its significance of aboriginal life, which was never understood by the new generation. It is significant to note that the description of landscape is not just an exercise to provide a frame to these novels, but it is a celebration of the topography of the native land which stands opposed to the denouncing of the assumed new world by the invaders. The land becomes the contested site, and it is the place one must return to for any kind of resolution.

“The mutually sustainable future of the humans, and other life-forms can best be achieved by means of a spatial frame work in which people live as rooted, active, participating members of a reasonably scaled, naturally bonded, ecologically defined territory, or life-place”(Thayer 6). The incongruity between our culturally constructed districts, zones, and networks and the natural abiotic and biotic tendencies of the lands upon which we live can be traced to the ways in which we understand where we are.

Largely, humans have forgotten where they live because they have ignored the natural dimension of the land. The first step toward a regenerative future for humans is to reassess where the current position held by every individual in the terrain of life.

Dinakaran's ideology about the relationship with nature goes like this in the novel “Our truth, dear children, is our primeval oneness with this earth, this water, this

forest, these birds and these fish!” (Joseph,242). The people of Aathi under the leadership of Dinakaran decided to uphold the integrity of nature once again. They realized the significance of preserving the five elements of nature-water, fire, air, soil and earth.

It was upon their age long serenity that Kumaran blew the strong tidal waves of darkness in the name of civilization. Dinakaran was the wisest man in Aathi. When Kumaran came with ‘behemoth’ project of filling the land and making Aathi into a high- tech city, Dinakaran along with Kunjimathu, Ponmani and Shylaja protested it. They sought the help of Adv. Grace Chali to file petitions against the filling up of land. But Kumaran had securely gagged the mouths of those who should have asked questions.

Kumaran subsided the fury of the agitators by giving them compensation and he asks a rhetorical question “Is there anything in the world that money cannot buy or compensate?” (Joseph 273).

The novel shows that there are a lot of things money cannot buy or compensate with. The tribal chieftain of Seattle, in his famous letter to the President of America, shared his doubt that how could we buy and sell the sky, the air and the water. Indians had a primitive culture which worshipped the five elements of nature with reverence. It is a sin to commodify the elements of nature. When man started viewing the elements of earth as objects for making profit, then started the ecological disasters. The novel depicts the predatory paradigm –shift from agriculture to agri-business concept that has spoiled our land and water.

The waters of Aathi are not inclined to dry up and vanish just because Kumaran wants it to happen. They worked with one mind, one voice and one will till they saw waves of green swaying in the paddy fields. They decided to mark a new beginning in Aathi as they started their life initially. “They had no food, no clothes, and no shelter. But one thing they had: water. It lay full and brimming, like the miracle of miracles. Water: the unending, ever renewing fountain-spring of life” (44).

Bioregionalism provides the perspective that by living within the limits and the gifts provided by a particular place, we can create a way of life that can be passed on to the future generation. We need to enlighten the future generations to create sustainable community. We must revitalize our educational, business, and political communities to manifest the principles of ecology. The bioregion has a great importance in the life of a person. To know the life-place is to know oneself. Culture and identity of a person are determined by the nature. People who take care of the life-place are the key to humanity.

CONCLUSION

The novel *Gift in Green* reassures the fact that there is an undeniable affinity with the human psyche and the dwelling place, suggesting an intrinsic interconnectedness. The affinity underscores the reciprocal influence between individuals and their environment, shaping identity and experience. Bioregional reading of this novel would prompt the reader to ask certain retrospective questions and find solutions through the powerful blend of nature and culture. Bioregionalism advocates that the health of natural systems is directly connected to the physical as well as the psychic health of the individuals and species, and for that reason natural system deserves, clearest attention and deepest respect.

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Pattern of Female Characterization in Girish Karnad's *The Fire and the Rain* and *Naga-Mandala*

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Abstract— Playwright Girish Karnad is highly respected in India for his depictions of characters navigating the complexities of Indian society. Even though Karnad's writings have received a lot of scholarly attention, the complex way in which he portrays female characters in his works is still a fascinating but little-studied subject. This study examines the various ways in which women are portrayed in Karnad's selected plays. The article identifies reoccurring patterns, and representations of characters that define Karnad's depiction of female figures through close textual analysis of *The Fire and the Rain* and *Naga-Mandala*.

Keywords— Girish Karnad, *The Fire and the Rain*, *Naga-Mandala*, Representation of Women, Gender and Indian Society.



Introduction

The topic of women has gained significant attention in post-colonial literature, both in India and in Western nations, as a result of various movements advocating for women's emancipation from the oppressive male dominance and patriarchal culture. Indian English writers have sought to address this imbalance by foregrounding women's stories and perspectives, thereby enriching the literary landscape and providing a platform for women's voices to be heard. Girish Karnad (1938–2019) was a prominent figure in Indian literature, theater, cinema, and public intellectual life. Girish Karnad's work exhibits elements of feminism, though he might not be strictly categorized as a feminist writer in the conventional sense. While his primary focus was not solely on feminist issues, Karnad's exploration of women's experiences, agency, and challenges within the context of Indian society demonstrates sensitivity to feminist themes. The article presents how women go through the same problems in life irrespective of their family background and social status. Although they belong to different family background their condition is the same and the treatment they get in the society is also the same. So, their plight forms a similar pattern in their

characterization and the same has been picturized in this article.

Female Characters

Girish Karnad's portrayal of female characters is marked by sensitivity, depth, and a commitment to authenticity. His works offer audiences a glimpse into the diverse and complex lives of women, inviting reflection on issues of gender, power, and identity in Indian society and beyond. Karnad depicts the condition of a typical Indian female in his plays, who is ruled by patriarchal order and bound by tradition, but whose spirit remains unbounded. Karnad, as a humanist, sincerely attempts to give a voice to the silenced majority through his plays. Vishakha, Nittilai in *The Fire and the Rain* and Rani in *Naga-Mandala* represent Karnad's effort to give them a voice

T.D Purakasyastha (2006) writes about the themes of silence in the play *Naga-Mandala* — it is marked by a meaningful engagement with the topos of a silent woman, whose speechlessness, Karnad regards with interest for its subversive potential. It is a landmark because of the way, it challenges the role of drama, basically a verbal artifact as a medium intended to capture the silence of the speechlessness with all its nuances.

Female Characters as Victims of Patriarchal Oppression

The first pattern we get to see in the characterization is that female characters are victims of patriarchal oppression; patriarchal decisions have been imposed on them.

In *The Fire and the Rain* Vishakha a Brahmin girl, is married in a high caste Brahmin family represented by the intellectual and learned men like Raibhya and her husband, Parvasu, who are endowed with spiritual knowledge and supernatural power as her father-in-law exhibits. But their family possesses the traits of patriarchal family system. Vishakha suffers because of male dominance. It is observed that Vishakha was forced to marry Parvasu when she loves Yavakri. This is a very basic principle of orthodox patriarchy that girl's consent is not considered she was unhappy but for the happiness of her father she got married with Parvasu. She says to Yavakri her former lover that,

Yavakri: Your father must have felt relieved that I went away.

Parvasu was a better match. I was only his miserable cousin.

Vishakha: Yes, Father was happy. I was married off to Parvasu.

I did not want to, but that did not matter.
(FAR 16)

After marriage Parvasu promised her that he would keep her happy. She enjoys her marital life. Vishakha feels that her husband accepted her as true wife. But her happiness does not remain long. Parvasu is very ambitious person. When he becomes main Priest of the yajna (a religious rite) without discussing it with Vishakha he decides to join the yajna he leaves his house. He does not think about Vishakha's feelings and emotions. He selfishly used her for his physical pleasure for one year then leaves home for seven years without thinking about her. Vishakha was left alone. He never cared to come to meet her, to know how she is doing.

Before her marriage Vishakha loved Yavakri she wanted to marry him but she could not. In absence of her husband Yavakri comes back in her life. She was very happy after meeting him as she has been alone for a long time, she felt alive after spending time with him. But she later finds out that he only used her. He seduced her because he wanted to take revenge from her father-in-law and her husband. He only used her for his selfish deed. This revelation gave her a shock. So, we see Vishakha has been oppressed by every male in his life, not only her father but her husband, her lover and her father-in-law. They all oppressed her in different ways.

Another oppressed person we see in the play *The Fire and the Rain* is Nittilai. Arvasu and Nittilai who are in their

teens: Arvasu is nineteen years old and Nittilai is just fourteen. Their teenage love is in progress and they are planning to get married. Nittilai belongs to a tribe. And to get married to her Arvasu must face the Elders of Nittilai's tribe. Going by the tribal custom every young man who wants to marry a girl must appear before the Elders first. But here the problem is that Arvasu is a Brahmin and Nittilai is a hunter girl. Their orthodox family will not allow this inter-caste marriage. Arvasu respects his elder brother Parvasu, a rigid Brahmin, but will not sacrifice his love for Nittilai for his sake. He is ready to face the Elders for her. But he cannot reach there in time, so he is refused Nittilai's hand. And Nittilai is forced to marry a man of her tribe. Thus, her dream of spending her life with Arvasu shatters.

Vishakha and Nittilai were not allowed to marry their lovers. If they married, they would have happily lived their lives. It can be said that family life of Vishakha and Nittilai remains tragic due to patriarchal oppression and dominance.

In *Naga-Mandala* Rani is also a victim of patriarchal oppression and child marriage much in vogue in the native culture. Her parents decide to get her married without even asking for her choice thinking that she is incapable of taking her own decision. She got married in her teens when she did not even understand the meaning of marriage. She is married to a person named Appanna, literally means 'any man.' So, it is not just the story of Rani and Appanna but that of any man and woman united in a wed-lock. Marriage is the age-old institution that has sometimes been unfair to women. Women are exploited physically, mentally, emotionally, socially and intellectually.

Appanna is involved in an extra marital relationship and has no interest in his beautiful, obedient, quiescent wife and goes gallivanting, imprisoning his wife at home. This helpless Indian village girl simply stands perplexed; unable even to weep. He gives all his love and care to his concubine and treats his wife like a maid. He comes home to take a bath and eat lunch only. He does not even talk enough with Rani. Rani is left alone in the house, with not even the freedom and courage to express her fear of loneliness. She struggles for words and when she hesitantly says, "Listen (fumbling for words) Listen-I feel frightened alone at night". He retorts, "What is there to be scared of? Just keep to yourself. No one will bother you." (NM 18)

According to Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker's extensive research on the play's composition, "Karnad reimagines the world of Hindu antiquity and constructs a story of passion, loss, and sacrifice within the contexts of Vedic ritual, spiritual discipline (tapasya), social and ethical differences between human agents, and interrelated forms of performance still close to their moments of origin" (xvii). The play's title itself encodes multiple meanings: fire

represents "passion, fury, wrath, jealousy, betrayal, brutality, and death," while rain symbolizes "selflessness, kindness, forgiveness, grace from on high, rebirth, and life itself." (qtd. in Kalaranjini & Krishnaraj 414)

Triangular Relationship – Two Men and a Woman

The next pattern we get to see is that Karnad dealing with his female characters dexterously presents the triangular relationship in most of his plays. Triangulation between two men and a woman comes repeatedly in Karnad's plays while portraying conjugal life. It seems Karnad's female protagonists crave for something other than what fate offers them as their life partner. They are not happy in their married life and they are suffering. Going to their husband's house they lost their identity. They want to feel belonged and after all love and belongingness is a need of human being. This craving gives birth to extra marital relationship.

In the play *The Fire and the Rain*, the female protagonist Vishakha keeps love triangle in her conjugal life, because her male counterpart Parvasu fails to understand her love and emotions. After one year of marriage Parvasu leaves his wife and he goes to perform the Fire Sacrifice for seven years. In his absence, Vishakha is subjected to Raibhya, her father-in-law's jealousy and lust. She feels tormented. Her peace of mind is lost.

In absence of Parvasu, Vishakha's past lover Yavakri approaches her. He reminds her of the love moments of their past. In past they had good time together. She loved him truly and had been happy with him. Though after her marriage all her love and loyalty were towards her husband only but under such difficult circumstances and under the influence of Yavakri, she breaks the rich Indian tradition of pious woman and meets Yavakri. Now she has been alone for a long time so meeting Yavakri for the second time makes very happy. She sits down and readily agrees to listen to him. She does not fear to express her desire to Yavakri. She becomes passionate and says that:

Vishakha: I was so happy this morning. You were so good.

So warm. I wanted to envelop you in everything I could give. (FAR 27)

She narrates to him how she has been left alone by her husband for the last seven years. She frankly confesses that the married life of one year gave her a great joy as her husband plunged her into a kind of bliss. But after getting invitation to become chief priest, he left her and since then she has been suffering in the hermitage 'like a she-devil' (FAR 15)

Nittilai in *The Fire and the Rain* wanted to marry Arvasu and for that Arvasu must present in front of the elders of the

tribe but because of his family issues he could not present at the time of the meeting. So, parents of Nittilai forced her to marry a man of the tribe. And she accepted it as her faith. But when she heard about the news that Arvasu has been badly beaten by the soldiers and there is no one to take of him. She ran away from her husband's house to rescue Arvasu. Her love towards Arvasu is unconditional and undeniable so she could not help herself and ran to help him. Although she denies having a love relationship with him anymore because she values and respects her tribal culture and sanctity of marriage, she also respects her husband so she feels guilty for betraying him.

Rani, the main character in *Naga-Mandala*, is married to Appanna. Their marriage remains unconsumed, as there is no love between the two. Appanna spends nights with his concubine outside, and treats his wife as a maid only. This treatment is like torture for her.

One day, Kurudavva, the friend of Rani's dead mother-in-law, visits her and befriends her. She tells about the story of the 'two pieces of a root' Rani listens to it very attentively. She laughs for the first time after her marriage when Kurudavva narrates how the root given to her by a mendicant helped her in marrying a man and "it took the plague to detach him from her" (NM 34). Perhaps, she has found a ray of hope in Kurudavva's tale. Kurudavva gives the same root to Rani and instructs her to serve it to Appanna. But somehow it is Naga that consumes these magical roots.

Naga started visiting her every night as Appanna. She was very happy when he was with her. Rani never doubts the identity of the man who visits her at night, though she has sufficient proof that he is not actually her husband. But why she should be suspicious when her husband does not love her maybe she prefers to remain ignorant. Whenever there is a doubt about Naga's identity, she makes no effort to confirm it. Thus, we see Rani also in a triangular relationship.

Gupta (1999) says about *Naga-Mandala* —It is remarkable achievement of Karnad's play that he adapts this 'man-oriented' folk tale in such a manner that it becomes the representation of the experience of man and woman in the psychologically transitory phase.

Female Characters as Victims of Emotional and Mental Torture

The third pattern we find is that Female characters in the selected plays of Girish Karnad are victim of emotional and mental torture; they also had to go through physical violence.

In *Naga-Mandala* when Appanna does not see Rani in the house and the dog barks outside, he becomes angry and as

soon as she enters the house, he slaps her "Rani collapses to the floor. He does not look at her again. Just pulls the door shut, locks it from outside and goes away" (NM 17)

Appanna becomes furious when he comes to know of her pregnancy. He maltreats her "Pushes her to the floor and kicks her." He cries: "Aren't you ashamed to admit it, you harlot? I locked you in, and yet you managed to find a lover! Tell me who it is. Who did you go to with your sari off" (NM 33)

In *The Fire and the Rain*, being a father-in-law Raibhya is supposed to take care of Vishakha and give her respect and care. But Vishakha is maltreated by him. When Raibhya gets to know that she met Yavakri, her past lover he grabs her by hair and starts beating her he kicks her. Raibhya's deed is unpardonable. Vishakha is subjected to humiliation when Raibhya uses filthy language for her, forgetting that he is the head of the family, he is supposed to protect her, take care of her and help her but he uses derogatory words, calls her "a buffalo that's been rolling in mud" (FAR 34). He further continues to threaten and rebukes her in the presence of Parvasu her husband: "you whore-you roving whore!" (FAR34). In front of Arvasu he calls her "bitch of your." (FAR 34) No husband can tolerate his wife being abused by his father in such a manner. But Parvasu does not try to stop him. He did not support her; he did not even speak a word.

Raibhya and Arvasu are agencies of patriarchal society that punishes a woman when they break a social law or go against the social or moral code of society. Her only fault was she was also a human being who wanted completeness in her life, she wanted to be loved. She wanted to feel that she is also something to someone; she wanted to have an identity because she was feeling lost and hopeless.

Alienated Women Protagonists

Another pattern that we find is that most of the major women protagonists are alienated persons and lost into the destructive force of existential crises.

Rani is alienated in the house of her husband when he ignores her and she dwells in the imaginary world isolated from the parents and her husband. She dreams like a child, longing for parents and their affection, being carried away by an eagle. She asks having lost the control of sense and of new responsibility "where are you taking me" (NM 7). The eagle replies, "Under the tree your parents wait for you" (NM 7). The dream makes Rani forget the torture that her husband causes, she demands like a child, "Do they! Then please take me to them- immediately. Here I come" (NM 7). Rani is so lost and lonely. There is no one who she could talk with. She finds comfort and solace only in her dreams.

The dejection Rani is subjected to and suffers from and the desperation that she finds into the locked room converts her into a meek and silent persona alienated from family and society that she cannot endure for a long time. She sobs and cries alone in that house without anyone to comfort her and in this way her pent up feelings and emotions find release.

Both Vishakha and Nittilai in *The Fire and the Rain* are alienated beings. Vishakha is left by her husband who joined the Yajna leaving her in the hermitage living alone and reduced to a skeleton. She is already alienated in the hermitage but when Yavakri molests her, her last hope also vanishes and is fumed to take revenge. Her mind has been so tortured that now she does not know which direction she should take and how her mind should rest.

Nittilai is the most alienated person. Neither she can go to her parent's home nor to her husband after fleeing from her husband's house. Being chased by her brother and her husband, she has to find a place in the dark forest to hide from the preying eyes. With Arvasu also she cannot make public appearance. She could not get chance to consume and enjoy the material life she had dreamt in the company of Arvasu.

Female Characters Subjected to Trial and Death

The final pattern that we see is Karnad's females are subjected to trial and death as two modes of punishment in their lives. Indian society and culture have their own discipline and modes of punishment, which do not let any member escape unpunished if they revolt against them. They keep watch and maintain invisible agencies for surveillance, and the individual must behave within the space she occupies. Whenever a woman goes against the moral codes and traditional laws of society, she has to face the consequences.

In *Naga-Mandala* the judgment committee, the village court, headed by the elders revives the traditional Panchayat, highly respected by the members of the society. Each society has its own traditional rules and codes of conduct. Such committees headed by men are the orders framed by patriarchal system of society wherein only male elders, the customs of the rules and regulation of the society, prevail and pass on the verdict whether right or wrong. The crime has conveyed to the village court by Appanna is that Rani has committed adultery. In the light of the complaint the village court asks her to prove her innocence on oath, "holding a red-hot iron in the hand" or by putting "the hand in boiling oil" (NM 36). both the traditional tests are so inhuman in their effects; they do not have an objective procedure to judge the honesty of a person, for both red iron and boiling oil will certainly burn the hands, no matter it is the hand of a criminal or of an innocent man. She takes snake ordeal as instructed by Naga.

Here we are reminded of myth of Sita in Ramayana who also faced fire ordeal without any of her guilt. In the play too, Rani is innocent, although she has committed adultery, it is Naga in the form of her husband Appanna who makes love to her. She thinks that she bears her husband's child and does not suspect Naga's identity till the very end.

In *The Fire and the Rain* Nittilai has to lose her life because she went against the tribal moral code. When she gets to know about the terrible condition of Arvasu, she left her husband and went to take care of Arvasu. In this way she breaks the so-called moral code of society and her tribal community. When Nittilai sees her brother and husband sitting near a fire with grim faces, she gets frightened, thinking that something ominous would happen. Knowing that she will be caught, she plans to hide herself in jungle to save her life.

Nittilai wants to live, live the earthy life to seek pleasure as well as work for the benefit of the people and society. But she has been chased and slaughtered for going against the tribal rules of marriage code. The tribal community is hostile towards woman who goes against community's rule and culture as they try to prevail within the system. She has been persecuted. this patriarchal society does not give right to her to choose with whom she wants to spend her life.

The patterns in the characterization of females in Girish Karnad's works stem from his engagement with Indian culture, mythology, and societal issues, as well as his commitment to creating complex, realistic characters that resonate with universal themes and human experiences.

CONCLUSION

Karnad's works often delve into the complexities of Indian society, where gender roles, traditions, and societal expectations play significant roles. His portrayal of female characters reflects these dynamics, exploring how women navigate and sometimes challenge these constraints. Through these female characters, Girish Karnad skillfully portrays the diverse experiences of women in Indian society, addressing themes such as love, desire, identity, and resilience. Through his female characters, he examines the complexities of womanhood and the societal pressures that shape their lives, offering insights into the human condition from a feminine perspective. These female characters reflect the intersection of identity, encompassing factors such as class, caste, religion, and ethnicity. He acknowledges the diverse experiences and perspectives of women from different social backgrounds, highlighting the intersecting oppressions they may face. The patterns in the characterization of females in Girish Karnad's works stem from his engagement with Indian culture, mythology, and societal issues, as well as his commitment to creating

realistic characters that resonate with universal themes and human experiences.

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Satyavati as a New Woman in Kavita Kané's *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty*

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Abstract— *The moment we pronounce the names of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the great epics of India, the great female characters like Kunti, Draupadi, Gandhari, Sita, Kaushalya, Sumitra, and Kaikeyi come to mind. It is said that many other female characters are no less important than they are, but they have not been given due place in retellings. Some contemporary Indian writers have begun giving voice to them in their retellings of The Ramayana and The Mahabharata. Kavita Kané is one of them, a fiction writer who gives lesser-known female characters a modern look in her retellings. Her keen interest lies in exposing these marginalised women characters, who have been largely unsung in Indian texts and creative writings. The present paper is based on Kavita Kané's The Fisher Queen's Dynasty, focusing on the character of Satyavati, the second wife of King Shantanu, the grand matriarch of the Kuru dynasty, and the first queen to rule Hastinapur, whose ambition is believed to have sparked the great war of Kurukshetra. Kané examines the black-and-white image of Satyavati in the Mahabharata and presents her as a grey character, referred to as the Fisher Queen. She hatches a graph of her journey from an abandoned fisher-girl child to the great matriarch of Hastinapur. She re-creates her personality as an assertive, sensible, courageous, and clearheaded woman who uses men's power to find her individuality in a male-oriented world and presents herself as an equal to men. The present paper deals with Satyavati, whose sharp wit and farsightedness subsequently shape the course of events and her destiny. It deconstructs the conventional image of Satyavati as a woman. It highlights her as a diplomatic, unapologetic, and bold woman, encompassing various roles such as daughter, wife, mother, and Queen.*



Keywords— *Mythology, Transformation, Swayamvara, Niyoga, Attitudinal shift, Contemporary Woman.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Satyavati is the leading protagonist of Kané's novel, and the entire narration revolves around the two key figures Satyavati and Bhishma; hence, the author places her alongside the other characters like King Uparichar Vasu, Sage Parasar, King Shantanu, Chitrangada, Vichitravirya, Amba, Ambika, Ambalika, and Sage Veda Vyas to project her personality from different angles. In popular narratives, Satyavati is portrayed as a selfish woman who usurps the throne of Hastinapur and the rights of Devarath, but Kané meticulously examines her place in history, deconstructs the traditional image, and humanises

her character with shades of grey. She is not a scheming woman from the beginning, rather an abandoned princess from her birthright; brought up as a mere fisher-girl who later changed the history of the Kuru Dynasty by marrying King Shantanu, with the stipulation that her son shall be the heir to the throne of Hastinapur. Though Bhishma is the rightful heir to the throne of Hastinapur, he renounces his claim to the throne. He takes a lifelong path of celibacy to fulfill his father's unusual wish to marry Satyavati. Moreover, she is the first woman to rule Hastinapur, make her own choices, and challenge the conventional patriarchal mindset.

II. DISCUSSION

In the Mahabharat, Satyavati is the second wife of King Shantanu and the stepmother of Bhishma, known by several names, including Kali, Matsyagandha, Gandhavati, Yojnagandha, and Daseyi, who later becomes the queen mother of the Kurus. Her life begins just like that of a fairy tale. The story of her birth in The Mahabharat goes like this:

Adrika swallowed the semen of the king, and after some time was caught by the fishermen... From the stomach of that fish came out a male and a female child of human form. The fisher wondered much, and, wending unto King Uparichara (for they were his subjects), told him all. They said, 'O king, these two beings of human shape have been found in the body of a fish!'... After the birth of the twins, the *Apsara* herself became freed from her curse... She left her fish form and assumed her own celestial shape.

(Ganguli, 2020. Book I, Adi Parva Section LXIII).

Moreover, it is also clearly mentioned that her father had abandoned her at birth because he wished a boy to look after his monarch, so he relentlessly gave her to the fisherman. Vyas ji holds that:

The male child amongst the two was taken by Uparichara. That child afterwards became the virtuous and truthful monarch Matsya...The fish-smelling daughter of the Apsara in her piscatorial form was then given by the king unto the fisherman, saying, 'Let this one be thy daughter.' That girl was known by the name of Satyavati. And gifted with great beauty and possessed of every virtue.

(Ganguli, 2020. Book I, Adi Parva Section LXIII).

Beyond the archetypal narration, Kavita Kané's novel is a modern interpretation of Vyasa's Mahabharata, giving her characters a contemporary look that makes them more relatable in the present scenario. Here, Satyavati is born through a woman (not a fish) named Adrika and King Uparichar Vasu, 'the mother gave birth to twins, sire,' her maternal uncle, Dasharaj, informs the king. 'Yes, I know,' replied King Uparichar Vasu shortly. 'I shall keep the boy with me. You can have the girl... She is your niece, after

all... He is abandoning the girl (Kané 4). And the journey of abandonment started from here. She was born as a princess and grew up as a mere fisher-girl with her maternal uncle, Dasharaj, a fisherman. Her mother died giving birth to her, and her father deserted her only because she is a girl. Despite being a princess, she never receives the royal identity her brother does, but instead faces discrimination and aversion in society. Due to her dark complexion and being the daughter of a chieftain, "Everyone is called her that – Kali – an unimaginative reference to her dark skin, dark hair, and dark eyes", and treated as a pariah. Though she is young and well-educated, people still treat her as an untouchable. Being part of the fishing community, she is destined to "sell fish and ferry people" (Kané 31), and because of this, her body smells like a rotten fish. That is why she is also known as *Matsyagandha*, which means one who has a fishy smell. The reason is also clear in The Mahabharat that "owing to contact with fishermen, was for some time of the fishy smell" (Ganguli, Section LXIII). Here, Kané reveals the sour reality of gender discrimination prevalent in society, where men have given privileges by their natural birthright, and women are deprived of that.

Kané brilliantly articulates Satyavati's character and re-examines the course of events in The Mahabharat. Though the outline of the story is the same, the author reveals a crucial fact from her life that leads her on a journey from a fisherwoman to the Queen of Hastinapur. Shifad observes, "It is a fresh perspective on the things that led to the fall of the Kuru Dynasty. Magic and reality are masterfully interwoven and liberties taken by the author are minimal when it comes to the plot setting" (Rev. August 30, 2021 <https://www.goodreads.com>).

In one of her interviews with *The Times of India*, Kané discloses the delineation of Satyavati in her book:

She is my favourite character in the Mahabharat, I confess! I see her largely as the most political person in the epic, the seeds of which are sown in the later narrative as the story unfolds... We see her as a widowed queen mother who ruled her own future, her family, and the kingdom, in addition to that of Bhishma. She unmade and made him. She turned him from Devavrat to Bhishma, while transforming herself astutely from Matsyagandha to Satyavati, and in doing so, changed the lives of all those in the epic. Yet we don't often fathom her significance. She

was the Queen in every sense (Chakrabarty, 2018).

The novel re-interprets things through a woman's point of view, and the major characters are presented through a female lens. From the beginning, she struggles for her existence in the androcentric society where everyone teases and persecutes her because of her dark skin. She reacts assertively and feels proud of her dark complexion, saying, "I am Kali; I don't mind my dark skin, I don't want to turn fair-skinned" (Kané 8). She protests for her rights, makes her choices and verdicts, and crosses the boundaries that have framed her to a limited world.

Satyavati is not like a typical Indian woman sitting beside the temple, waiting for her fortune to change; rather, she is a contemporary woman who makes her own decisions and shapes her destiny through her actions. She says sturdily that "I – not Fate or God – shall be responsible for my own happiness, my own future" (Kané 31). Being an ambitious woman, Satyavati does not want to marry Rishi Parasar to live as a Sadhvi. She coupled with Rishi because she knew he was the only one who could convert her smell into fragrance. He is the well-known rishi, and through his magical power and his words, he can curse and bless someone; so, she asks thoughtfully, "I smell of fish. Can you remove it? ...People flee from my stink... who wants to make love to a foul-smelling fisher girl?" (Kané 17) Rishi Parasar promises her and perfumes her body. He says, "You will no longer be the stinking fisher girl, *Matsyagandha* will now be *Yojnagandha*; your new, musky fragrance will waft for miles together and shall entice anyone whom you want" (Kané 18). She cleverly encounters the Brahmin by igniting his sexual desire, uses her sexual power to control him smoothly, and is granted everlasting virginity as a blessing. "Satyavati, gratified with having obtained the excellent boon in consequence of which she became sweet-scented and her virginity remained unsullied, conceived through Parasara's embraces" (Ganguli, 127).

Satyavati is a practical woman, introduces herself to King Shantanu by showing herself as a hardworking woman, "We work with our hands: they are our sole fortune... I rely on these hands for my present, my future... Unlike the fortunate rich who hold their wealth in their hands" (Kané 55). It was quite strange for him because, for the very first time, he met a woman who was as hard as his dagger. Though she was highly intoxicating, her pragmatic philosophy impressed him deeply. Her perspectives on life are very clear, and they show in her words as she considers it as a whole.

She is aware of the artificial structure of the hegemonic society where a woman has been designed to be dictated,

ruled, and considered as a trophy for men. She knows that men use women only for their pleasure and then throw them out of their lives, so when King Shantanu proposes to her to be his lady, she asks him savagely how he will keep her, "As his concubine or a consort?" She does not want to repeat the history in which her mother was used as a pawn in her father, King Uparichar's, game, who never accepted her mother as his wife; therefore, she wants to make it clear before accepting his proposal. Though she knows he loves her and that she will be the younger Queen, she does not let her feelings sway her; she is apprehensive about her future. For her, "Marriage is not a love story, it is a treaty, a political pact, a pledge" (Kané 74). She reminisces about her father's words, "Don't be sentimental; politics also rules emotions, not just kings and crowns and kingdoms" (Kané 74-75).

She knows that Devavrata is the rightful heir to Hastinapur and to make sure that her progeny will be the successor after her marriage to King Shantanu, she makes him (Devavrata) compel to take the terrible decision, "I shall never marry, and, henceforth, shall dedicate my life to celibacy and unbroken chastity. I swear that I shall remain without a wife and child till my last breath" (Kané 91). It might be an awful act in most of the versions, and for that, she is stigmatized as a wicked woman. Still, being a woman, she wants to secure the future for her descendants in Hastinapur and to do so, she initially takes advantage of Rishi's power to make her perfumed, then uses King Shantanu's sexual urges to clear her way toward the throne and finally takes advantage of Devavrat's loyalty in every possible way that secures her status and the throne for her progeny. She intelligently manipulates malepower to safeguard her position as Queen, challenges patriarchal norms, and emerges as an empowered woman. "She is neither weak nor vulnerable" (Kané 39). Kané says, "She had just wrested the throne from him and grabbed it for herself and her future children." (Kané 89).

Satyavati is a strong-willed woman who grew up in a poor maiden family. Still, because of her determination and marvellous nature, she earns the title of *Queen*, and for this, she does not care about the socially sanctioned ideology. After holding the position of a Queen, she also becomes the representative of the fisher community and raises her voice for their rights. She thinks that "The fisher folk have as much as much of right to live with dignity, as the other citizens of the state" (Kané 142). It's a paradox in society that if someone gets a higher status among them, they cannot digest and oppose him in every possible way; a similar kind of situation Satyavati is facing, where people violently oppose her, saying, "You are not a queen by birth or by worth" (145). Though she

gains the power and position of the Queen, she remains conscious of fisher beings, their struggles, and their welfare. Mahato, Bhushan, and Kapoor also acknowledge her voice for the underprivileged people who always thought of the betterment and the upliftment of the fisher community because they are the weaker section of the society, and they are marginalised people" (RWND, 252).

Let us see the different sides of Satyavati as a mother as well as an ill-ruled queen of Hastinapur. Satyavati is very clear in her thinking and plans. She is the mother of two princes, Chitrangad and Vichitravirya (Virya). Satyavati knew that Chitrangad was more capable than his brother Virya, but his premature death crumbled down her ambitions. As a mother, she laments her son's death, but as a queen, she decides to train Virya to the throne. She is a clearheaded woman, astutely selected Kashi princess for her son Vichitravirya, discusses his marriage with Bhishma, and tells him, "I don't want just a pretty face. She should have enough political clout to consolidate the Kurus as the most influential empire" (204). According to her, only Kasi princesses are eligible to be the Queen of Hastinapur. However, the King of Kashi does not want to do this, so he does not invite Hastinapur to participate in the *swayamvara*. She, as a queen, retaliates against Kashi and responds angrily, "Kasi will have to pay dearly for this insult", so she forces Bhishma to abduct Kashi's Princesses.

She is unique in her approach towards progeny and therefore takes a paradigm from Rishi Parashuram, who annihilated the twenty-one generations of royal warriors and Kshatriyas, leaving the kingdom heirless; only widows then created a new generation. She says, "I think the royal women defeated Parashuram's purpose beautifully. By going to rishis and Brahmins, they were still the creators of their progeny, a new race". She advocates her thoughts and accepts the custom of *Niyog* for the queens:

Through Niyog, I am giving the same powers to my daughters-in-law. It is not the men who are important..., it is the women who give birth and create a new life, a new hope, by perpetuating their family line, their dynasty, their clan, their race. Through men claim it to be theirs, in the name of Patriarchy (Kané 284).

Niyog is an ancient Hindu practice that permits a woman to beget a child from another man, whether her husband is incompetent or has died without producing an offspring, but there are certain rules about whom and how she can produce her child. Moreover, the progeny would belong

to the man with whom a woman got married, no matter whose seed it is. There are numerous historical examples of women practising *Niyog*. As Devdutt Pattanaik describes the same concept of *Niyog* in his *Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of Mahabharata*, he says, "It does not matter who sowed the seed in the field; what matters more is who the master of the field is... Fatherhood is defined by marriage" (Kané 12). Here, he narrates the story of Tara, the wife of Guru Brihaspati, who begets a child from Chandra; yet, Brihaspati is considered the father of her son, not Chandra. For instance, in *The Mahabharat*, Dhritarashtra and Pandu are born through the practice of *Niyog* because Vichitravirya died childless; yet they belong to his father and the Kuru race. Besides, Kunti's sons also procreate through *Niyog* because Pandu is unable to beget a child, so he allows his wife to practice *Niyog*. Satyavati knows that one of her sons has died and another is impotent, so she convinces her two daughters-in-law, Ambika and Ambalika, to practice *Niyog* with Rishi Ved Vyas. Initially, they are not ready for it and argue with her, but Satyavati cleverly manipulates the queens' minds, making them realise how they will shape their destinies as queen mothers. She says, "By going to Vyas, and not Virya, you are still the mother of your child...Would you not like to have a child, a child to love?" (Kané 301). Through Satyavati, Kané conveys to the world that women play a crucial role in procreation: "It is not the man who is important...It is the woman who has the power to create a new life" (Kané 301). Aditi Dhirghangi also accepts the same concept of progeny and says, "This perception of Satyavati counters the patriarchal view of men responsible for the creation of a progeny. She broke this stereotype and postulated that women are important because they are the real creators of offspring" (Kané 131).

Kané weaves a complex web of her identity. There are lots of contradictions in her personality; on one side, she becomes the voice of subalterns, a suppressive community, assertively reacts against wrongdoing, and raises her voice for her rights, and on the other side, she becomes a ruthless, mad-ambitious, cold-hearted woman; she subjugates others through her power and self-centred nature. For example, she feels remorseful towards Bhishma for usurping his right to be king; simultaneously, she feels victorious for saving the throne for her descendants. Besides, there are two sides to her decision towards progeny; one, she sends her daughters-in-law to a stranger so that they can feel motherhood; feel victorious rather than a victim, as she says, "See it as a power, a choice, to have a child" and the second, she forced them to be with a stranger, just because of her strong ambition to procreate an heir to the throne as it was

empty since the death of Virya. Moreover, despite knowing that Virya is not eligible for the throne, she argues with Bhishma to crown him, "My son is ill, not diseased!... And even if he were, no one, even you, Dev, would have stopped me from crowning Virya as a king" (Kané 212) while, she is more conscious of crowning the eligible successor to the throne; therefore, ready to make Vidur a crown prince of Hastinapur. Apart from this, she considers a woman a creator and the child belongs to her, but when it comes to Vidur, she considers him the son of Vyas rather than the son of her maid (Parishrami): "Vidur is like them: the son of Vyas."

She is practical in her approach, always believing in her actions and decisions, which help her control her life and shape her destiny. She intellectually frames her life; for example, Rishi Parashar used her to fulfil his amorous desires, but Satyavati turned this event into an opportunity to make her fragrant. Besides, she marries a man who is twice her age and becomes the Queen of a great dynasty. Along with these, she secured the throne of Hastinapur for her offspring and ruled there vivaciously. She intellectually accomplished all castes and classes and established harmonious relationships among the people. Moreover, her decision not to remarry ruined the plan of other princes who had a calculating eye on Hastinapur. She knew "if she remarries, it will be dangerous and she will not gain a husband but lose Hastinapur to some king" (Kané 187).

Satyavati's journey is not easy; she faces many hardships that make her a tenacious, rigorous, and fierce woman. As Bhishma acknowledges her strength and says, "Do you know what's inevitable about you – you take the bad with as much grace as the good and move on. You will never give up; your never-say-die spirit will not allow you to surrender" (Kané 315). It would be apt to mention the comment of Lopamudra Adhikary about Satyavati's character: "Kané's Satyavati is a self-confident, undaunted woman who never succumbs to the convention of the patriarchal society and takes her stance in the face of any untoward situation. She perfectly fits in this image of a modern woman" (Creative Flight, 2021).

III. CONCLUSION

Kavita Kané re-evaluates Satyavati's character and gives it a contemporary feminist twist. She is an empowered, vivacious, and self-centred woman who knows the political acrobatics. Although she belongs to the lower community, her lower status does not hinder her ambitions; rather, it makes her more assertive in responding as an outspoken woman. Here, Satyavati's character is distinct in that it attempts to change the

stereotypical image and procreate alternative values. She subverts male voices and offers a fine line for the reader to reimagine female voices and their experiences. There are some unsung and sideline facts of her life that Kané delineates through her perspective. Kané also illuminates the most important characteristics of her personality, i.e., her clear-headedness and farsightedness, with which she wins over King Shantanu by marrying him. Second, as a Queen, she becomes adamant and firm in her decisions to save the throne of Hastinapur. And the third, as the grand matriarch of the Kuru family, who finally realises all her blunders and enters the Ganga for salvation, which makes her perfectly grey. There are, no doubt, some contradictions and perplexities, but it is also true that it brings about an attitudinal shift in her behaviour and makes her a new woman of the contemporary world.

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An analysis of Hale's narrative in debunking social norms and maxims: The Poststructuralist element in *Princess Academy*

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Abstract— In the period of 1960s, in France, the Poststructuralism was emerged having the ideology to question the binary opposition and semantics. The core idea of the Structuralism which was based on these two pillars, hereby confronted before the intellectuals who staunchly adhered the concept of plurality of a given text. Poststructuralists argued that the meaning that derived from a word or symbol, can be various according to the context depending upon the situation. Therefore, the meaning of a word or text must be sought out of the relevant intention of the given context, not by limited or fixed to the binary opposition or semantics. The concept of the arbitrariness of a language was replicated on the anthropological, philosophical, psychological and sociological perspectives separately in order to examine with extensive and inclusive practices. The 'real' meaning is arbitrary according to the exponents of this theory. By keeping that theoretical approach on the foreground, this paper aims to take a fantasy trilogy named, *Princess Academy*, written by Shannon Hale, as a primary text to present the societal context where the author has given narratives tinged with poststructuralist dimension. The characters and the plot those are posited with 21st century feminist point of view, found quite adequate for the descriptive research in the field of women's role in a society through diversity and inclusion. Moreover, it is very significant to put a paradigm as deconstructing the patriarchal narratives and concept of liberation. Shannon Hale's trilogy, *Princess Academy* has plotted so many characters, but for the particular scenario of the research, this article has taken only few of the female characters in the forefront to make a possible representation in the above-mentioned objective.



Keywords— Binary, Coexistence, Kyriarchy, Plurality, Poststructuralism, Society.

A critical approach of poststructuralism and society:

Shannon Hale is an American writer who has produced so many marvelous fictions of fantasy. *Princess Academy* was first published in 2005. The sequel entitled, *Princess Academy: Palace of Stone* came out in 2012 and the last part of the trilogy entitled, *Princess Academy: The Forgotten Sisters* was published in 2015. The plot of the story begins from a fictitious highland mountain named Mount Eskel. The occupation that is accessed by the Eskelites is the mining of an expensive fictitious stone named Linder. Hale introduces a very cunning fantastic feature in the plot, i.e. Quarry-Speech. It is the tool of

communication among the mine workers during their work. They usually make its use when it is needed to be communicated. For an example, due to the deafening blow of the mallets for breaking the stones from the mountain walls, one can say or utter something in his mind to intend somebody else in the mine and eventually the message is communicated to the addressee. "Then, when they needed to speak to another person, the mountain used the rhythm to carry the message for them" (*Princess Academy* 15). One fine morning, a delegation comes from the lowland, the kingly state named, Asland. The delegation is sent from the King of the state who wishes to find out the

potential Princess out of the Eskelite girls aging twelve to seventeen. And, a Princess Academy has to be prepared where the girls would be trained in order to become eligible for that position. Now, very interestingly it is quite obvious that this particular feature of Quarry-Speech is a fantastic element that makes this book a fantasy fiction. Moreover, the development of the story, the incidental happening where Hale has introduced this Quarry-Speech as a tool of survival, urgency, resilience and identity of the mountain people as the core sensitivity. The plot represents the hidden urge of girl child about their own homely feelings, nativity, love, interests, affection, and dreams and so on. There are some evident arousals of some questions from the intention behind the setting of the plot. First, in the name of fantasy, why the author has put a low fantastic element if considered so, as this is not a groundbreaking phenomenon to some extent to have communication among people while not being present in person. In today's world, Telepathy, Telepsychics, a clinical theoretical concept given by Dr. Joseph Murphy, are not unknown to anyone in the field of parapsychology. Dr. Murphy says, "Everyone possesses the power of Telepsychics, which means constant communication with the various and marvelous powers of your mind" (Telepsychics vii). Why the author has not made some exclusive imagination by incorporating some otherworldly features which could make this fiction similar to Tolkien, Lewis Carroll or Rowling? Moreover, why she has compiled the fiction as a Young Adult narrative while playing with the serious issues like child marriage, education, protests, mutiny, university politics and so many universal perspectives? Furthermore, why the fantastic element involves the mountain stone Linder and the Mount Eskel itself instead of using Unicorns, Demigods, Human sharing half animal body parts and so on and so forth?

The answer can be sought in a very specific way of taking poststructuralist dimension in the study. First of all, in the time of 21st century, Shannon Hale has not probably wanted to borrow the age-old idea to consider fantasy, they way it has been taken in consideration in the past. Fantasy does have a stereotypical notion of producing improbable, intangible ideas and manifestations of elements. Starting from the beginning of the time the mediation of Greek, Roman mythological aspects, Indian Epics, folklores, folk adaptations of scriptures, stories like *Panchatantra*, *Hitopadesha*, *Vetal-Panchavimsati* to Rudyard Kipling's *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi*, Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, Rowling's *Harry Potter* to Marvel Cinematic world in nowadays. Hale has not taken those elemental activities that produce some magical interventions that might dilute the intended meaning of the fiction. Structuralists' ideology has never

back the idea of coexistence, while poststructuralists' argued the essentiality of the binary oppositions and the meanings that derived from a given context. Once Michel Foucault said, "we must not imagine the world turns towards us a legible face which we would only have to decipher" (Foucault). If we take a closure examination of the text by Hale, she has mingled the factors but, essentially produces the idea of simultaneous progression. Besides, She has ensured the debunking of social narratives by taking a deconstructing attitude by incorporating education as a social and psychological pillar for a girl child while they are subject to be uprooted by any means in almost any given context that also gives us a system of social binary as a set of norms and maxims. A fantasy critic, Eric Primm says, "Fantasy is often judged by its world-building. Fair or not, the setting makes or breaks the story as much as the characters. The world of the story influences characters and plot by its very mechanics" (Putting the Fact in Fantasy 1). So, it is quite legitimate to say that, the idea of fantasy can also be understood according to the 'very mechanics' of the plot and therefore the character-buildings are also dependent on the given context. This notion is the foremost objective of this article to find out a possible amplification of poststructuralist dimension out of the social narratives. Hale has set a paradigm of simultaneous coexistence among the meaning and its application according to the reality perspective. An article entitled *Post-Structuralism* by Pallab Das, a renowned professor of English, Mankar College, is found very adequate in this context. He says, "post-structuralist studies often re-introduce the historical element to analyze descriptive, diachronic concepts. The re-introduction of the historical element serves to destabilize the fixed meanings applied by structuralist categories" (Das).

As an alternative theoretical framework of this subject, the study of this article has also borrowed the concept of 'Kyriarchy' given by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in 1992 in her book entitled, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation*. The term is derived from two Greek words, 'kyrios' (lord, master) and 'árcho' (lead, rule, govern). In terms of studying poststructuralist idea in 21st century, Kyriarchal concept can be very productive to be used as a tool to make an extensive substantiation. Hale has signified the plot in terms of many perspectives, but, the core integration is laid in the issues of domination of the society by its own narratives and surroundings. This is why, nowadays, in the feminist studies, the concept of 'Kyriarchy' can be an integral part to be amalgamated with. Kwok Pui-lan, a critic who published an article entitled, *Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Postcolonial Studies* in 2009. According to his words,

In feminist theory, kyriarchy is a social system or set of connecting social systems built around domination, oppression, and submission. The word was coined by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in 1992 to describe her theory of interconnected, interacting, and self-extending systems of domination and submission, in which a single individual might be oppressed in some relationships and privileged in others. It is an intersectional extension of the idea of patriarchy beyond gender. (Pui-lan)

The aim of this article is to posit these issues related to the poststructuralism and kyriarchal dimension. The concept of *Kyriarchy* is even more dangerous as the concerns of domination and oppression do not cast any specific boundary or narrative in order to set a discriminative procedure of functionality. In the field of society, feminist perspective is not totally capable enough to decode the mystification of one's individual oppressed state of being. Thus, this research has theoretically captured this idea of presenting an alternative pass to examine the boundaries of limitation in ambiguity of understanding. Shannon Hale's *Princess Academy* covers this area of study very inherently if observed.

***Princess Academy* as a narrative of patriarchy and a delusional grandeur:**

This section of the article focuses mainly on four parts of the trilogy. First, it takes on the formation of the Princess Academy and the migration of teenage Eskelite girls along with a spunky little fourteen years old girl Miri, the protagonist of the story. Princess Academy symbolizes not only as a mere institute to train the girl, but also it gives an array of opportunities for the girls like Miri, Esa and Britta to touch their dream and knowledge. The role of Tutor Olana is very significant mainly in the first book of the trilogy as she is appointed as the mentor by the royal priests to make the Eskelite girls learn about etiquettes, decorum, history, commerce, 'poise', 'curtsy', 'diplomacy', etc. Throughout the plot, Princess Academy plays a symbolic role, starting in the first book from Miri's journey, Tutor Olana's command, and Lady Sisela's past life in the second book, up to the three abandoned sisters Astrid, Felissa and Susanna in the last part of the trilogy. Secondly, Hale has cunningly incorporated the different psychological aspects of Miri and Britta by mingling them together in a bond of friendship and simultaneously also shown the greedy urge of being a potential princess by Katar and Bena, two other important characters in the plot. Britta's childhood past takes a major role in debunking the patriarchal hood that signifies the domestic trauma guided by the familial space and the resilience of a girl. The third aspect to look forward to examine the pivotal role of Lady

Sisela in *Palace of Stone*, who played as the exponent of 'Revolution' which also includes university politics in the plot. This part of the trilogy makes this a poststructuralist study where women play a significant role as a motivator and also as a commodity. The author has put that significant manifestation inherently throughout the story. Fourthly, Queen Sabet with her unscrupulous and insolent attitude as a queen and a wretched mother of being snatched of her three daughters Astrid, Felissa and Susanna to send them outstate in order to maintain a royal lineage by making her elder son coroneted as the prince and the future king. Above all these, Hale ensures the development of Miri's psychological and social role as a girl, as a friend, a lover and a potential tutor, who is supposed to be the disentangled figure of all odds.

Tutor Olana, Lady Sisela and Queen Sabet as the prey of patriarchal narrative:

In the first book of the trilogy, Tutor Olana's character mainly involved in this part as the appointed teacher of Princess Academy for the girls coming from the mountain. Her character is very interesting in both ways; first, she acts as the tool of the kingly state and intended objective for making girls potential in order to produce a princess in the birthday of Prince Steffan, the elder son of King Bjorn and Queen Sabet. Secondly, if closely observed, the outburst which is grown inside the mentality of the girls out of Olana's staunch operation and vigilance over girls' activities and progress, she herself is inherently responsible for that. Hale has stunningly incorporated the illustration by making Olana's character in these shades in two ways that might be taken into consideration as a true meaning of teacher.

In one occasion, Olana declares her supremacy and boldness by defying any possible softness in her conduct. Sometimes even she sounds very insulting for the mountain girls as they are not as advanced as her expectation. "I have heard about Danland's outlying territories – no towns, no marketplace, no noble families. Well. Once you pass these columns and enter this building, you're agreeing to obey me in all things. I must have absolute order in this academy if ever I am to turn uneducated girls into ladies. Is that understood?" (Princess Academy 39). It clearly defines the harshness of her conduct and her attitude towards the girls who might have some urge to acquire knowledge. Very significantly, Hale has set this narrative as a Young Adult fiction by probably having an idea to debunk the societal narrative that mutilates a girl at her very early age in an intention to not make her aware of understanding. Thus, it gradually makes a girl child uprooted from her very own belongings, her nativity, homely feelings, dreams, education, interests and

all that could encourage her for the further progression in life by her own.

On the other hand, Olana has not failed to agree to the potential demand made by Miri and the girls in terms of having permission to go home to their families. She has taught them Diplomacy and the girls have made an appropriate use of it against their own tutor. She is impressed by the systematic presentation of the argument with step by step procedure by Miri with association of the other girls, especially Britta. "I am impressed," said Olana. "I hadn't expected as much from mountain girls" (156). By this gesture and dialogue of Olana, Hale has shown a conspicuous attempt of presenting a true conscience of a teacher and an implied manifestation of poststructuralist narrative in the plot. Thus, Olana's role is very pertinent if considered for the potentiality of a woman in social sphere.

In the second book, *Palace of Stone*, Lady Sisela's character represents a self-reliant figure whose word postulate the idea of 'Revolution' guided by the Queen's Castle scholars, especially Timon Skarpson, with whom Miri develops an affectionate relationship during her stay in Asland as the lady of the princess. In this plot, Hale has introduced university politics, protests by a lower class community named 'shoeless' and the commoners against the atrocious King Bjorn. Sisela's character is a symbol of traumatic outburst against the phallocentric domination which prevails in the society in the name of rules and norms. Her presence in the plot also signifies a role of a woman in the provocation of possible outrage with the association of students and political hands. Lady Sisela seemingly acts as a negative role in the plot on the basis. But, if considered deeply, her past life shows the hidden trauma and the grief-stricken persona that is grown out of the unscrupulous treatment of the royal manner. During a conversation with Miri, Sisela told, "I danced with King Bjorn when he was a prince, and waited to hear if he would choose me. He did not. At the time I was *heartbroken*" (*Palace of Stone* 77). It signifies her long delved affection of being a princess of Prince Bjorn which has never been fulfilled and went far long in her oppressed state of mind. Her outrage turned multiplied when she faced her most unfortunate moment when her husband was executed by the royal guards for rebuking against king's tributes. Thus, Lady Sisela's mentality and her grown up trauma have been cumulated as a shape of running the kingly state in the name of 'Revolution'. Here is the true success of an author if considered from the dimension as a poststructuralist. Hale has shown the unsuccessful outcome of Lady Sisela in the end by not having the intended result what Sisela and Timon planned for. Hale has never postulated any radicalized idea during the plot in an action, rather shown the failure of outrageous activities

in 'Rilamark Revolution' where people executed the queen and erupted in hellish mirth in the name of protest and after few days, they turned again clueless and famished for not having any proper plan to run the freedom. Hale has symbolically shown the execution of the Rilamark Queen as a symbol of chauvinistic vent and nothing else.

Queen Sabet's character represents two consciences hinged with insolence and wretchedness. How satirically, Hale has described a queen in the opening lines of chapter three in *Palace of Stone*:

*A queen there was in a place of bread
Sing blue, sing white, stay up all night
She nibbled the walls and gobbled her bed
Sing white, sing blue, sing ballyhoo*

*The folk begged crumbs from their robust queen
Sing blue, sing white, she ate all night
She shared not a thing until it turned green
So white, so blue, the mold it grew* (*Palace of Stone* 25)

These lines clearly signify the insolent attitude of a queen as it also criticized by the author and her way of description in order to show the hierarchal position of a woman but having nothing to do with the problems and plight of lives of the common people who come to an end to their day being famished. But, even being a queen, a supposed-to-be the motherly figure to the state, Sabet stays absolutely unperturbed amidst the petrified statesmen, women and hungry kids with their scanty hopes of lives. Shannon Hale has given a segment of Queen Sabet's inactive lifestyle by attributing her position of a high order. This is a true significance of a demonstration while it shows the heinous touch of royalty that makes a motherly life completely retarded even in the abundance of limitless wealth but, no humanity.

On the contrary, the same Queen Sabet has been presented with petrified heart and wretchedness having an oppressed soul for years for the abandonment of her three daughters Astrid, Felissa and Susanna to Lesser Alva, a swampy land under the rule of King Bjorn. In the last book of the trilogy, *The Forgotten Sisters*, Sabet's character is described tinged with this melancholic emotion whose emotion has been suppressed for a long time just by keeping her shouts unheard in the name of grandeur royalty that has not even spared the Queen's daughters' lives from being banished. Hale has described very conspicuously the falsehood of the royalty that maintains the lineage by practicing unimaginable acts by snatching girl children one by one from her own mother which does not even mercy a Queen, who is the highest ranked lady of

a society. This particular nuance is the true presentation of poststructuralist study and the meaning that cater unexpected narrative which goes undercurrent. In an occasion when Queen Sabet confronts them, she has not found anything to say except being ashamed. "At the door from the palace to the courtyard, Queen Sabet waited, her hands clutched before her, her eyes down" (The Forgotten Sisters 248).

How stoically, Hale has incorporated the scintillating force of womanhood as a powerhouse of every possible origin and on the contrary, how patriarchy uses all these as commodities and the source of fertile reproduction by ruling on it. If we take a short look on the character of Tutor Olana, she has respectably maintained her duty as a responsible teacher while goes against the girls and their will but, inherently it goes positive in the end. Lady Sisela's trajectory of life began as an innocent one being the same as the others who imagine their future in a dream-world. Later, she was petrified for having her husband executed by the royal guards that turned her life dismal. Though unsuccessful, but played a powerful role for the 'Revolution' that also signifies her potential presence. Queen Sabet is the symbol of utter oppression whose life seems floating on abundance but, suffocating repeatedly for maintaining the grandeur of falsehood.

Miri, Britta, Astrid, Felissa and Susanna as the symbols of resilience:

Miri and Britta's characterization produces ample motifs and dimensions throughout the plot. The author has deliberately posited these two girls' attitude towards the treatments of society, whether it concerns their familial background, love and affection or their educational urge in the path of escalation. If, Lady Sisela, Queen Sabet, Tutor Olana to some extent, is the subject to be carried away by the social captivation, these two characters are the true significance of resilience and retaliation due the whole discourse of the narrative. Miri is grown up having not so attractive vital specification comparing to the other mountain girls having tall and strong bodily features. It is because; Miri has never been allowed to work in the quarry for having a past history of her mom's accidental death. Therefore, it is quite beautifully illustrated by the author while Miri is grown up with extensive mental development and intuition that is pretty rare in the other girls, except Britta for innately belonging to the lowland. Hale has staunchly selected teenage girls character development tinged with emancipation, compassion, urge, retrospection and retaliation with having a probable idea to show the empowerment of women at her very young age. And, how the castration process is accessed by the society, especially for the excessive ill practices of chauvinism, the

author has conspicuously demonstrated the facts by showing the abduction of girl children's nativity by migrating them to the other land, only for becoming a potential princess. In the end of the second book, Britta gets betrothed to Prince Steffan, but the narrative is very deliberate and straightforward, that, Britta and Steffan have been known to each other from their childhood. It is the love, sheer affection between them which makes their bond successful in the end of the day. While, the glimmering charms, buzzing atmosphere, royal hierarchy snatch the other girls to the Princess Academy, especially observed in Liana, Katar and Bena's character, Miri goes for the ultimate urge for having the unknown to know. In the second book, *Palace of Stone*, Miri and the other girls are invited to the royal castle as the ladies of the princess, Britta. Hale has shown the staggering psychological dilemma of Miri while having some confusion between the choice of Timon Skarpson and Peder Doterson, who is the childhood friend and love interest of Miri and vice-versa. But, with the time being, as the plot goes through so many facets of understandings, Miri gets mingled with Peder at last. The same goes with Britta, as she and Steffan know each other from childhood and get betrothed while the meaning of the plot always triggers towards the hierarchal value of being the princess. But, the author has maintained a beautiful flow to show the alternative values in teenage sensitivity that often gets distressed by the intervention of the patriarchal fang. Hale has also shown the distressful past life of Britta as her life once tormented due to the ill domestic treatment at household. Britta's parents always wanted her to get chosen and married eventually by the royal blood, which signifies the impurity of social monolithic ideas in the name of caring nature. In a conversation between her and Miri, Britta says, "And my parents preferred to spend a great deal of time at court, attending plays and concerts. They said their house in Asland was too small to bring me along. It had ten bedrooms, but it was too small for a girl...like a mouse house, maybe" (Palace of Stone 212). Very interestingly, the research has observed the appropriation of entitling the second book, *Palace of Stone*. Human heart and the linder house have been compared in this plot while the mankind that is supposed to be the abode of compassion, but, lacking with no failing. On the contrary, the linder stone by which the mount Eskel is surrounded, the Princess Academy itself is made off, the palace is made off where the blue-bloods live, can be able to carry the message with proper rhythm what Hale has used as the fantastic element in this plot.

Astrid, Felissa and Susanna are the three abandoned sisters live together in Lesser Alva, a swampy land where Miri has been appointed as their tutor and ordered by King

Bjorn to prepare their house itself as another Princess Academy. Eventually, the house is also made of linder stone that can carry message through memory as Quarry-Speech. These three characters are introduced in the last part of the trilogy, *The Forgotten Sisters*. Hale has also shown the patriarchal necessity of the production and reproduction of women while it is urgent. Throughout the plot, it is ensured an inherent fallacy of the society to use the women as commodities, whether it is for the case of Tutor Olana, Lady Sisela, Queen Sabet or the three daughters of her and moreover, Miri in this particular book. While, Miri wanted to go back to her own land, Eskel, to her family, it is staunchly ordered by the King and the authority to make her the tutor in order to prepare the royal girls to be the potential material of princess for King Fader, the Storan king, who is about to invade the surrounding lands. The intention is to offer a potential teenage bride to a septuagenarian king in order to make Asland an alliance of Stora. Here, the heinous narrative of social culture is exposed by the author in a very straightforward way. Miri has been too specific and string in terms of her emotion but, for a while, being the prey of shabby practices. The universal issue of child marriage is targeted here and this time it is even more brutal, as the things are being negotiated among the social hierarchy. It is to be understood that, the violence, trauma and misogyny are not limitedly subjected to comparatively lower-class people. These are the social curse, rather the misogynistic domination that not even spares its own. "Self-esteem is a contributing factor when it comes to leadership qualities. Women's self-esteem is usually low compared to that of men. Poststructuralism can be used effectively to explain feminism" (ivypanda.com). These three girls are symbolized here as the enforcement of resilience, self-reliance and spirited nature. They did not know the exact identity of their parents while, they were brought up by a lady named Elin, whom they knew as their real mother who died long ago. Astrid, the elder among them, even older than Miri, has been caring her two sisters by nourishing, caring and giving nuance as a motherly figure. The three do not bother about the 'allowance' that is sent to them from the royal palace, though it is snatched by a merchant goon named Jeffers. They three collect their daily needs according to their own choices and needs. Moreover, the astounding fact is, they hunt caiman for meat by fighting and killing it by their own which shows their potential effort as empowered ladies. That is too astonishing fact to Miri as well, as she has not witnessed that kind of retaliating force and strength in her life except her father and elder men in Eskel. In this plot, Hale has even introduced 'a champion match' in chapter 23 between Astrid and a gigantic soldier of Stora named Sten. Astrid

with her tricks and strength knocked out the man on the floor that makes everyone awe. At last, with so many eventual happening and incidents, King Bjorn and Queen Sabet have found their true emancipation to accept the truth and their lost daughters. Steffan has finally met his three sisters, among whom Astrid is the elder of all. In a royal gathering Steffan announces the crown belongs to Astrid as she will be the Queen. "You will be exactly the ruler Danland needs. And I'll be here whenever you need me. We'll figure it out together. Besides, Pa is healthy as a horse. He'll live for years" (*The Forgotten Sisters* 315). It seems the real change that is brought by the narrative produced by Shannon Hale. This can be considered as the way of revelation which shows the openness, fight for the right and true voice of women empowerment. The true meaning of princess is illustrated as a beautiful scene in the last page of the last chapter of the book. "Miri leaned back against the throne of the hill and opened her book. The goats bleated over the new green grass. Above her, the sun burned against the snowy top of Mount Eskel. The golden light blazed around Miri's head like a crown" (322).

CONCLUSION

This article has taken societal issues like, education, child marriage, trauma, grief, greed, surge for true emancipation and sacrifices, and so on and so forth, as the subjects to produce a potential study on the basis of two sole objectives. The first one is the women's role in a society through diversity and inclusion, and the second one entails the deconstructing the patriarchal narratives and concept of liberation. Princess Academy as a symbol is described with the various perspectives in this article. Moreover, the binary opposition is presented through the specific description of the characters of Tutor Olana, Lady Sisela and Queen Sabet's vulnerability and on the other hand, Miri, Britta and the three sisters' resilience. Hale has additionally included an epilogue in the last part of the trilogy *The Forgotten Sisters*, where she has incorporated a major change by showing an academy prepared, but this time it is meant for the potential princes coming and joining from different strata and will be taught by Tutor Olana once again. Thus, this trilogy makes a potential description of studying poststructuralist idea to derive meaning of unconventional existence, which shows the ultimate liberation of women's voice. The coexistence in the plurality prevails.

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Love and War Nexus in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets*

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Abstract— Love and war are two evergreen subject matters whose significance transcends literature. These two themes are major thematic preoccupations of several novelists, playwrights and poets in literary works from different parts of the globe. Previous studies on Akachi-Adimora Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets* have examined it as war literature as it is a representative example of Nigerian novels which are inspired by the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970). This study was, therefore, designed to critically evaluate the treatment of love and war in the novel with a view to filling the gap in literary scholarship of the paucity of studies which have concurrently analysed the motifs of love and war in the novel. Radical feminism was adopted as the theoretical framework. The interpretive design was employed. Akachi-Adimora Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets* was subjected to literary analysis. The novelist makes the point that during war-fares, people still manage to fall in love and out of love. The intensity of war cannot prevent people from expressing their innate feelings of love, and even getting married. In the novel, war meets ordinary people like Ginika, Eloka, and Nwakire, disrupting their personal plans. Conditional love and dysfunctional love such as love between Ginika and her father, Eloka's mother and Ginika, and Auntie Lizzy and Ginika are all demonstrated. The study makes the point the themes of love and war are so glaring in Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets* that studying them concurrently is a rewarding literary enterprise.



Keywords— Love, War, Radical feminism, Nigerian novel, *Roses and Bullets*

I. INTRODUCTION

Love and war are evergreen subjects which have been explored by many literary writers in different parts of the globe. This study interrogates the treatment of love and war in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets*, a representative example of war literature. *Roses and Bullets* is inspired by the Nigerian Civil War, a war that was fought between the Federal Government of Nigeria and the Republic of Biafra, a secessionist state which had declared its independence from Nigeria in 1967. Nigeria was led by General Yakubu Gowon, while Biafra was led by Lt. Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu (Peter Baxter 6). The war raged between July 1967 and January 1970. It resulted in the wanton loss of thousands of human lives and several properties

There have been a number of studies on Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets*. Sola Adeyemi (28) explicates on the key concepts of war, trauma and psychotherapy in *Roses and Bullets*. He posits that the novel is a quintessential example of Nigerian Civil War literature as it reminds us of the brutality of the war and its gruesome effects on the characters in the novel. He argues that the novel distinguishes itself from other previously published Nigerian Civil War novels in that "none of the earlier published works has attempted to dissect our minds with the psychological consequences of the war as Ezeigbo has done in *Roses and Bullets*." (28). Imam Abdulkadir (1) x-rays the extent to which Adimora-Ezeigbo captures memories of the Nigerian/Biafran war. It moves on to illustrate how she utilizes the atmosphere of war as an arena for symbolic relationships. It also probes into the deteriorated nature of

these relationships with a hint of optimism. Using New Historicism and Post colonialism as platforms for analyzing the text, the work concludes that despite the greatness of human prospects, individuals or societies end up with little or no satisfaction. According to Imam Abdulkadir (7), the forceful conscription of untrained youths and their release to the battle fronts with little or no war equipment, knowledge or food to protect and preserve themselves and Biafra, is what catches the satirical eye of the author. Grace Motunrayo Ajala (55) critically examines the plethora of feminist issues vividly captured in *Roses and Bullets*. Employing African feminism as theoretical framework, Ajala attempts to find out how the writings of the female writers show areas of convergence and divergence in the presentations of the tenets of feminism. Marriage, negative portrayal of male characters, mother-in-law interference, sexual harassment and gender violence are some of the tenets of African feminism discussed in the study. On mother-in-law interference, Ajala (58) opines that "Ginika's experience with Eloka's mother showcases interference of mother-in-law in many marriages in the African setting. Eloka's mother believes that it is the duty of a woman to ensure her husband gets her pregnant."

Remarkably, while most of the studies on these novels have foregrounded the brutality of the war and crisis in the novels, few have examined love in the novels and how the characters still manage to fall in love in the midst of war, insurgency and crises. In addition, few of these studies have treated the themes together in single studies despite the fact that love and war are two of the major thematic preoccupations of Ezeigbo in *Roses and Bullets*. By critically examining the treatment of love and war in the selected novel, this study fills these afore-mentioned gaps in literary scholarship.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: RADICAL FEMINISM

The theoretical framework for this project will be feminism, with a particular focus on radical feminism. Western feminism is radical feminism. Radical feminism is a form of feminist theory that emphasizes the patriarchy as the root cause of gender inequality and advocates for the complete restructuring of society to eliminate gender-based oppression (Murfin & Ray, 24). Radical feminists argue that violence against women is a product of patriarchal society, and that the only way to eradicate violence against women is to fundamentally alter the power structures that allow for it to occur (Rice 14).

Radical feminism emerged in the 1960s and 1970s as a response to the limitations of liberal feminism, which focused primarily on legal and political equality for women within the existing patriarchal system. Radical feminists

argued that gender inequality is deeply embedded in society and that it cannot be addressed through reformist measures alone. Instead, they called for a complete restructuring of society to eliminate gender-based oppression (Morgan, 1970).

Radical feminism sees the patriarchy as the root cause of gender inequality and violence against women. According to this theory, patriarchal systems prioritize male power and privilege, while women are relegated to a subordinate position. This system perpetuates violence against women by creating and maintaining power imbalances that allow men to exert control over women (Rice 16).

Additionally, unlike liberal feminists, they see paid work as not liberating for women, as they often acquire the "dual burden" of paid work and unpaid housework, which maintains the patriarchal nature of the family. Some radical feminists even argue that women suffer from the "triple shift" of paid work, domestic work, and "emotion work," where they take on the emotional burden of caring for children.

Radical feminists also see rape, violence, and pornography as methods through which men secure and maintain their power over women. Domestic violence, for example, accounts for a significant proportion of all violent crime, with nearly one in four women experiencing it at some point in their lifetime. Women are much more likely to experience this than men, and radical feminists point to these facts as evidence of the systemic nature of patriarchal oppression.

In opposition to this patriarchal system, radical feminists aim to combat gender-based violence, including domestic violence, which has long been neglected or ignored. Through their activism, they have contributed to increasing public awareness of these issues and helped bring them to the forefront of public discourse. The primary objective of radical feminists is the eradication of patriarchy. They place great emphasis on the concept of the body, the reclamation of women's bodies, and their freedom of choice. Radical feminists demand the freedom of sexual and reproductive rights, including unrestricted access to contraception and abortion. Women must have the autonomy to make decisions about their bodies, including the option to engage in non-heterosexual or non-reproductive sexual activities.

Thus, using radical feminist theory as a framework for this study will allow for an analysis of how the selected literary text challenges and subverts patriarchal structures that enable violence against women. By examining the representation of love and war in *Roses and Bullets*, this

study will provide insights into how love and war occur concurrently during war-fares.

Love and War in Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets*

Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets* is a novel of war and love. It is the story of two young lovers, Eloka and Ginika, who fall in love with each other and desperately want to keep it, in spite of the searing influence of war and bullets. It is a pointer to the fact that no matter the situation people find themselves, they will still manage to fall in love. The title of the novel is symbolic. Roses represent love while bullets symbolise war. In the novel, love is engendered by tumultuous situations of war. The novel reveals the saga of how many women are turned apart as a result of the Nigerian Civil War.

At the beginning, the love between Ginika and Eloka is a strong and solid one. The love Ginika is deprived of in her father, Ubaka, is salvaged in Eloka's arm. Ginika's dream of a nuptial bliss with Eloka is, however, contended with the invincible forces surrounding the war. Eloka and Ginika's love is sealed when they get married as husband and wife. However, their marriage as well as love for each other was plunged onto quicksand when Eloka gets enlisted in the army. His absence triggered ugly occurrences that put a knife at the heart of the marriage. In Eloka's absence, Ginika, in order to run away from her mother-in-law's cantankerous attitude towards her, had to go partying with a friend and got drugged and sexually molested in the process by an army officer. Enquiring about Ginika's pregnancy, her mother in-law bellowed: "I asked you this question before and I want to ask you again because of Eloka's visit home. Are you pregnant?" (*Roses and Bullets*, 84). This question puts her on edge. As Ginika gets pregnant for this anonymous officer, her mother in-law's family as well as everybody abandon her for such "sacrilege". In the end, the child that Ginika gives birth to later dies. She lost all even her love, Eloka, except her precious life and hope.

Beyond a tale of two lovers, *Roses and Bullets* chronicles a story of didacticism, moralising philosophy and exercise in alerting humanity about the futility in seeking for social change and justice through the prism of war. The novel is wrapped around the story of the Biafra war. It reveals the horrifying condition of women in the civil war. *Roses and Bullets* reveals the devastating consequences of war, especially on women, the weaker sex, and the vulnerable group in human society. The love between Ginika and Eloka is halted and destroyed by the Nigerian Civil War, and further complicated by other circumstances. The novel focuses on the families of these two enigmatic characters, and their conflict-ridden relationship. The happiness that Ginika's family radiates at

the beginning of the novel before things begin to fall apart is evident thus:

They had burst out laughing when the blast of a car horn caught their attention. Could that be Uncle Ray? Ginika wondered. It didn't sound like him. He hardly honked his car horn. If he did, it was always a sharp or gentle hoot. In fact, he would sneak up on everyone, going about the house quickly, even if he had to tug his things along (*Roses and Bullets*, 6).

The novel lends credence to the veracity of the fact that love is an evergreen topic which will always play itself out, no matter the situation. Ginika's life is a symphony of love, war, death, pain, bliss and betrayal. Adimora-Ezeigbo is dispassionate, profoundly candid and devoid of the pretentious bias common among authors of similar stories. Adichie and Adimora-Ezeigbo explored in their narrations of the civil war, those areas most women are reluctant to explore. Amidst the strafes and flaks contending for national unity and advancing of the new Biafra nation is the intense love of Ginika and Eloka. The love Ginika is deprived of in a strict father, Ubaka, is salvaged in the arms of Eloka and the attentive nature of her brother, Nwakire. Ginika's dream of nuptial bliss with Eloka is riddled with the invincible force that characterizes the war. Ginika will hope to return to school when the pogrom ends. She will also nurture the faith of reuniting with her lover- turned-soldier when Biafra finally gains independence. As the characters of Ginika and Eloka are bedeviled with these marshy hopes and murky circumstances, only the flailing consequences of war will define who they eventually become.

Though the book is wrapped around the story of the Biafra war, it does not aim towards achieving reckoning of the horrible civil struggle as many have been wont to. *Roses and Bullet* successfully attains closure of the grim realities of the Biafra time; which, I think is far commendable to the unbiased views that skew the objective narratives of some. As an academic material of information, which is one of the snags in the piece, it irritatingly drip-feeds an unaware reader with the nuances and intricacies of the Nigerian Civil War. That alone makes it so slow-paced that it tries the patience of an uncommitted reader so dearly.

Roses and Bullets is essentially the story of a love relationship that blossoms and dies in wartime Biafra. At a time Nigeria and the secessionist Biafra were locked in mortal combat, these two young people fell in love. The whirlpool created by the pogrom destroyed them and their

love, just as it shattered so many other dreams, lives and beautiful ideas. Ezeigbo tries to capture all these in *Roses and Bullets*.

When Eloka gave Ginika a red rose, it was the finest gesture to convey the depth of his feelings for her. He considered her pure and beautiful and worthy of his sacrifice, both as a lover and as a soldier. Rose is a symbol of love, beauty and purity and the red rose meant all these to Eloka. Red also is the colour of blood; the blood of the youths of Biafra that sacrificed their lives, their talents and their potentials for their fatherland. To Eloka, the sacrifice is double. He was willing to give his life to protect his country. By protecting his country, he would also be protecting his love and his wife, Ginika, his Mermaid as he fondly called her. Eloka demonstrated in the novel that he is capable of self-sacrifice, for the sake of both Biafra and Ginika. The idea of Biafra and the person of Ginika were his ideals and passion throughout the war. And when Biafra lost and he discovered what he regarded as Ginika's betrayal and infidelity, he had no wish to continue living really.

There was an intense romantic love between Eloka and Ginika, a sharp contrast with the intense pathological hatred between Biafra and Nigeria. In the novel, Eloka gave Ginika a red rose (growing roses was his passion). Eloka could be said to love his country more than woman when he joined the war rather than stay behind to protect Ginika from the danger of losing her, if harm were to come to her, which finally came. After all, Ginika said to him once: "I'm sure when you were in the war front, you didn't think of me...except the fight before you." (221). In other words, can we split a red rose and love one part? Eloka once said to Ginika: "Dear girl, if you ask me not to fight, who then will fight in this war?" (185). Eloka knew why he joined the army, "to fight and fight with contentment until victory is won." (109). A trying phase of their love is when Ginika is raped by a soldier. Eloka did not believe Ginika when she said her pregnancy came from a silent rape by a soldier.

Marriage is the culmination of genuine love between a man and a woman. It is an important motif in feminism. Feminist-oriented literary works typically foreground the experiences of women/female characters in their marriages in their novels. Most of the time, such female protagonists do not enjoy their marriage. In Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, the protagonist Nnu Ego never enjoys her two separate marriages to Amatokwu and Nnaife Owulum. In Ifeoma Okoye's *Behind the Clouds*, Ije has been married to her husband Dozie for years but they had no issue. She went to virtually all the hospitals to know to see if the reason for her childlessness can be solved. On the other hand, Dozie's mother never liked her and adding

to the fact that she was childless heightened the whole issue. She kept on persuading her son to take a second but because of the love Dozie had for the wife Ije, he refused heeding to his mothers advice. They kept managing their lives until another woman came in, who claimed that Dozie got her pregnant and she would stay with the father of her baby. Virginia succeeded in talking Dozie into allowing her stay in his house, things fell apart for Dozie and Ije but thank God for Ugo Ushie, Ije's friend who stood by her. It was later found out that the baby of Virginia was not Dozie and he sent her out of his house and then pleaded for the forgiveness of his trip which shows is the cause of their childlessness and they taught of a better way of solving it. The same bitterness of marriage is evident in Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman At Point Zero* where Firdaus suffers terribly in her forced marriage to a much-older, repulsive man, Sheikh Mahmoud.

In *Roses and Bullets*, the relationship between Eloka and Ginika ends up in marriage. When Eloka introduces Ginika to his parents as the girl she wants to marry, the father noted that Ginika is beautiful and 'unspoiled'. His father smiled, "you chose well, my son. She is beautiful and young, I can see she has not been spoilt. When I see the way girls run after soldiers, especially officers, I cry in my heart..." (169). It should be reiterated that the relationship between Eloka and Ginika is selfless. Unlike some other young girls that run after soldiers, Ginika's love for Eloka is unconditional. Eloka's parents' approval of their son's choice of a wife shows that in Africa, marriage is a very sensitive issue which requires parental consents. The parents did not stop at the physical assessment of Ginika; they also planned to carry out an investigation about her family. However, Eloka is so sure he made a right choice.

"Yes, she seems a good girl. We will make enquiries to ensure she comes from a good family: the type of home we would want our daughter-in-law to come from." "You can make enquiries, if you like," Eloka said, but I would like to marry her as soon as possible." "Nna, that is all right" His mother's eyes were soft and bright. "I agree the girl is very beautiful" I hope she is well mannered. Agwa bun ma, character is beauty. Let us hope she has a good character." (170)

Adimora-Ezeigbo tells her readers about the traditional wedding ceremony between these two lovers. This is an attempt to make a distinction between genuine relationship between a man and a woman and a short-term

one between those who run after soldiers and are messed up. A true relationship leads to marriage and the girl must receive her parents' blessing before leaving for her husband's house (193-194). The marriage of Eberechi in *Half of a Yellow Sun* who was pushed to a soldier by her parents is a very wrong one. A woman has the right to make her choice of a partner. Perhaps, that was why Olanna insisted on marrying her choice and not that of her parents.

Eloka and Ginika's genuine love for each other is sealed when they get married. Prior to the marriage, they are head-over-heels in love. It is a classic case of love at first sight when their paths crossed:

Throughout that day and evening,
Ginika's thoughts were full of Eloka

Odunze. She could not get him out of
her mind even if she tried her hardest.

His image cast a shadow she could not
ignore- a lively and vivid mental picture

of a figure after her heart. She tried to
imagine a possible scenario where

she would act in a play written, directed
and produced by him (27).

Nevertheless, Ginika never gets carried away. She meditates deeply on the marriage before plunging into it. She knows that marrying Eloka would rather than stop her education, aid it. Eloka had promised they would not have children until after the war. Eloka also plans that when the war is over, Ginika could take the qualifying exam and go straight to Nsukka, where they would be together as they studied. However, their marriage and love for each other experience a major hiccup when Eloka enlists in the army in the cause of the Nigerian Civil War. Eloka and Ginika love each other dearly even after their marriage. Eloka does part of the house chores in order to assist his wife. "Mermaid, I have swept our room and tidied it. You'll like it when you see it..." "Mama will have a fit if she hears you swept your room," Ozioma said. "Don't let her hear you. She will say you're spoiling your wife." (196). Eloka's mother's supposed reaction portrays the belief of the African men that women are acquired properties and one of the reasons for marrying them is to do all the house chores. They believe it is a taboo for a man to be involved in house chores. As a matter of fact, men that cook, sweep or fetch water for their wives are perceived as being hypnotised. As a result, such women are referred to as witches. In spite of the happenings around them, the love between the couple waxes stronger. They had both vowed to remain together till death do them part. Ginika told herself she would love Eloka till death did them part, as she had vowed the day the pastor joined them as husband and wife. She also recognises

him as the best man for her. However, their beautiful home and marriage was affected by communication gap when Eloka joined the army. Eloka's absence gives way to some ugly occurrences which could have been completely avoided if he was around. Eloka's absence gave room to mother-in-law's victimization. Ginika suffers immeasurably in the hands of a wicked mother-in-law who displays a cantankerous attitude towards her. The mother-in-law's attitude shows that women sometimes oppress themselves and they are sometimes their own worst enemies. This points out the fact that, it is not only men that oppress women, hence, both gender need to relate in love and unity for peace to reign in the society.

The problem Ginika faces with her mother-in-law and the loneliness she experiences when the husband is at the war-front made her to accept the invitation to a party that never holds but ends up in ruining her life. Here, Adimora-Ezeigbo is making a point that communication is very important between a husband and a wife. Eloka's absence from home led to happenings that destroyed his marriage to Ginika. This means that a break in communication may cause a fragmentation of social relationship. In Eloka's absence, Ginika, in order to excuse herself from her mother-in-law's hostility and bad attitude towards her, followed a friend named Janet, to a dance party that never holds. Ginika is not really enthusiastic about the party; she only agrees to go with Janet because she becomes frustrated with Eloka's mother and she wants to run away from her troubles. Unfortunately, she is drugged and sexually molested by Lieutenant Ugoro (271). If not for her husband's absence, Ginika would not have had any reason to attend the party. Adimora-Ezeigbo has pointed out here that one of the negative consequences of the civil war is that it caused separation and tore homes apart. Similarly, when Olanna was absent from the home in Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Odenigbo committed atrocities. It was during the period that she impregnated Amala. At another instance, he slept with Alice, when Olanna was not around.

War is central to Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets*. It is a novel which is inspired by the Nigerian Civil War. When the novel opens, the youthful hero, Ginikanwa, is tormented by a letter she had recently gotten from her dad. In this, the novelist at first forecasts the common war which Ginika's later verbal defiance strengthens. The more extensive anecdotal universe in which a grisly clash seethes among Nigeria and Biafra parallels the confined universe of Ginika with every one of its torments and nerves as she straightforwardly fights with knotty issues emerging from the war.

Her training is put on hold as Ginika moves to her town where she meets and weds Eloka. Eloka enlists in the army, joins the war front, leaving his young spouse helpless before a philandering father-in-law and a relative whose colossal craving for a grandchild puts an undue pressure on the youthful Ginika. As she continues looking for aid, Ginika is medicated, assaulted and impregnated by a Biafran soldier. She is roundly condemned and rejected by her spouse's family, her father and her beloved husband, Eloka.

The mental and physical outcomes of war are broadly worked out on Ginika as best depicted in her appalling appearance when she was protected from the army installation. *Roses and Bullets* efficiently questions the reasonableness of man who plunges into war despite his consciousness of its devastating consequences. The storyline takes the reader to the war zones to observe the detestations of war and presents to him/her once again into various homes and lives to exhibit the outcomes. Voices of exploited people, inside and outside a few fight grounds, talked perceptibly even in their unceasing quiet and quelled presence. Disjoined appendages, headless bodies and incorporeal heads, ruined, spoiled and malodorous tissue all join to strengthen the brilliant declarations of starvation, assault, sexual indiscrimination, sickness, distance, oust, persecution, dismissal and over the top covetousness all reporting the savagery of the so-called humanized man:

However, the political crisis in the country worried Eloka; he saw it as a threat to peace, and a threat to peace is a threat to education and development. He became more concerned as the killings of easterners intensified and got out of hand in northern cities, towns and villages. He watched as easterners, especially Igbo people, returned home in droves (88).

Enervating torment and strengthening delight are portrayed side by side in *Roses and Bullets*. Happiness is punctuated by sorrow while anguish is supplanted by joy. The clear depiction, sensational record and nitty gritty pictorial portrayal of the lucky love connection between Ginika and Eloka injects vital components of joy in that excruciating story and makes an environment of warmth the capacities to splash the tangible pressure incited by the war. That angle is fundamentally in charge of the grand nature of the novel. What's more, the unalloyed help promptly and enthusiastically offered to Ginikanwa by Chito's family is another viewpoint that beneficially attempts to find great even amidst wickedness. This additionally outfits the story

with a basic human face. At the same time, the book inspires great chuckling as much as it causes tragic tears. It along these lines accepts the status of a normal human story past being a story of war.

To just pursue the novel as a story of a past occasion or a recorded piece is to decrease its general hugeness and hence do offensive bad form to the throbbing power and illuminating mission of the novel. Indeed, even today, the growing roses of our reality are routinely battered by savage projectiles activated by common doubt generally developed upon our disparities. It is consequently not an account of 'previously' yet a story of 'now' and a story of 'after', as long as humankind keeps on bowing to troublesome elements of language, ethnicity, religion, class and sexual orientation.

At this juncture, we shall examine the various manifestations of violence and brutality of the war as vividly portrayed in *Roses and Bullets*. Some of these manifestations are highlighted below.

• Rape

The motif of rape runs through Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets*. Many soldiers engage in the nefarious act of raping innocent women and ladies who become the casualties of assault of the war. This is on the grounds that this circumstance breeds malevolent and moral wantonness in the general public. Armed force officers frequently take opiates and liquor to enable them to withstand the pressure and sight of what they witness and, all things considered, they may end up acting preposterously. Ogbazi states that, "as a rule, the ladies endure the worst part of various dimensions and types of underhandedness and corruptions in struggle circumstances." (27).

In *Roses and Bullets*, Ginika is kidnapped and secured up a room in the Barracks. She is blamed for executing Sergeant Sule Ibrahim, who circumcised himself so as to marry her. In the room, three warriors sprained her lower leg and assaulted her

She struggled to free herself but they held her and pushed her to the ground.

She screamed and one of them clamped a rough hand on her mouth. Divesting himself of his clothes, the sergeant grabbed her legs and prised them open...

I go fuck you, ashawo. You kill Sule. He be better man pass all your rebel brothers.

Dat thing you no give Sule, I go take am today. Ashawo!... Make you do your

own, he said, pointing to one of the soldiers (295).

Ginika's rape propels the plot of the novel. She is sedated and sexually assaulted when she goes with a companion (Janet) to a military camp as a result of the hostile conduct of her mother-in-law. Accordingly, she gets pregnant for the nowhere-to-be-found soldier. The pregnancy ends her marriage and prompts the disaster in the novel.

• Starvation

Starvation is one of the negative impacts of war. Chinua Achebe vividly captures this in his civil war memoir, *There Was A Country*, where he posits that the federal government deployed the weapon of hunger and starvation to conquer the secessionists. Adimora-Ezeigbo in *Roses and Bullets* exposes the impacts of starvation on the general population particularly the vulnerable group, women and children. There was abnormal state of starvation in the land as can be found in the graphical portrayal of destitution in the novel as being experienced during the civil war.

The rate at which many individuals contract kwashiorkor was disturbing. The destitution was not constrained to the poor of the land alone yet even the alleged white collar class and rich additionally endured a similar confidence as the methods for getting sustenance was winding up slight because of besieging of the land and different causes. This can likewise be affirmed in the life of Auntie Chito and her kids. She used to be alright and had enough to eat. In the later part of the novel when the war had negatively affected the family, they scarcely had enough to eat every day. Truth be told, the starvation and neediness was severe to the point that Ginika chose to risk her life by going behind the adversary lines to purchase things.

So I am planning to go to Ahia attack-attack market next week...Udo, I have to go.

Perhaps I'll be able to bring back food. The situation is desperate as to you can

see. (322).

The above portion demonstrates the dimension of starvation in the land and the dimension it drives Ginika as she was prepared to chance her life to rescue their neediness stricken circumstance. In another point in the novel, Udo needed to act like a shell stunned officer to get alleviation materials for them not to bite the dust of starvation.

• Disruption of Academic Activities

War disturbs scholastic exercises of any society. During the war, schools were either shut down, demolished or utilized as displaced person camps. The quick consequence of this conclusion of schools was early marriage and extramarital

perversion, which offered ascend to undesirable pregnancies. This is on the grounds that an inactive personality is a fallen angel's instrument. In *Roses and Bullets*, Ginika wedded Eloka despite the guardians' dismissal and hostile conduct towards her since she was inactive. Notwithstanding the war, she would have been in her school at Elelenwa considering how to make her future brilliant.

Ginika can walk the length and breadth of the Biafra boundary without fearing sudden conscription to fight for the land's defence. It is true she does not have to surmount the attacks of the vandals (the Federal soldiers) at the war front. But the helplessness created by the loved ones taken abruptly from her will redirect the course of her life. After Nwakire, her brother, joins the Biafra troops to further the noble cause of Biafra, Ginika struggles to live under her uncaring father (Ubaka) and her nagging stepmother, Lizzy, who is a semblance of a caring mother. Ginika later finds comfort in the loving arms of Odunze Eloka. That is not to last too. The cocoon Eloka's love ensconces her with is torn when Eloka proudly enlists himself into the Biafran force. This triggers the origin of Ginika's definitive sorrow as she battles with tearing challenges from her mother-in-law. In her resilience to overcome her multiple pains, she is defeated by the unbridled semen of a Biafran lieutenant at Nkwere. {*Roses and Bullets*, p. 371-376}

Eloka and Nkwere (Ginika's brother) might have indeed outplayed forced call-up into the army. As the only choice of honour, Nkwere and Eloka answer the patriotic beck of the new nation. What their contemporaries do in conscription they undertake in voluntariness. The horridness war does to humanity change their destinies with irredeemable taints.

During the civil feud, Nigerian government's campaign of unity is carried out through mass pogrom and distortion of its citizens' psychology in the new Biafra nation. I wonder how the flicker from Ejike Okoro's lantern becomes the spotlight of an armed camp of Biafran soldiers. Ejike Okoro does not deserve what he encounters. He is innocent just like those being internally displaced by the war. He is no rebel. He hasn't ever been to the war front. What Ama-Oyi habitants only seek for is a safer and secluded region to continue the practice that makes life sustainable to them. They defile sacredness, moving their Orie market into the forest to avoid the attention they might call from an armed jet. It turns out their course of action isn't well thought out. They fail to remember that anything Biafran in the glimpse of a Federal Government's jet plane is a rebel that must be droned for unity to live.

It is just the end of war. Ginika's only desire is to redeem her marital honour when her husband, Eloka comes

home. She hopes for forgiveness when Eloka listens to her woes. She doesn't need the love of Sule Ibrahim to be whole. All she hopes for is the unfastening of the burden that weighs her soul. That Sule Ibrahim circumcises himself before she gives him attention is just a scarecrow she puts up to remain Eloka's own. Why should she be violated by the Federal Government armed men who have come to request the blood of Sule Ibrahim from her? She has no hand in his death. Sule Ibrahim is a subject of his foolery. Why should he have been driven by infatuation to circumcise his genitals at his age?

Udo and Ginika are the perfect allegory of the psychological torture children were subjected to in the war. Udo's experience at the battle front robs him of his puerile innocence. After the war is declared done, the hunger and horror Udo witnesses will make a new being of him. The discomfort of Amina Yaro, a northerner in Ganika's class, signals the cut of the taunting rope of the seemingly unity between the North and the East. Amina Yaro can't bear the conversation the portended civil war is generating. Out of self-volition, Amina stops coming to school. She perceives herself as a threat to the East. She returns to her homeland.

III. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the research had been able to extensively look into the different realities of love and war in postcolonial Nigeria, using Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets* as case study. Without mincing words, the study will make meaningful contributions not only to literary scholarship but also to the Nigerian society at large. Love and war are evergreen subject matters in Nigeria and across the globe.

Despite the high level of poverty and economic hardship in Nigeria, people still manage to fall in love. The love sometimes culminates in marriage. Love remains an important thing keeping many Nigerians happy despite the different layers of hardship in Nigeria. Mercifully, since the Nigerian Civil War ended in January 1970, there has not been any civil war in Nigeria. However, to eke out daily livelihood in Nigeria can be likened to waging a daily existential war.

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Pragmatic Expression in Aashadh ka Ek Din

(In Context of Communicability of Theatrical Language)

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Abstract— Drama is a living experience that gets its vibrancy on the theatre itself. Although drama, like other literary genres, is also a medium of linguistic expression, and being worded, the expressive power of language will be given as much importance to it as in a story or novel, but even if it is worded, it cannot be called empty literature. Being interactive, the verbal element (interactive language) becomes the main element in the play. The play reaches from creator to director, from director to actor and from actor to audience, and in this journey, (theatrical) language plays most important role. On this platform the uniqueness, originality, complexity every aspect of the play starts to become apparent. In this context, the concept of theatrical language becomes important, because it is the theatre that communicates the play to the observer through various colour devices. In this research paper, an attempt has been made to understand the relationship and psychology of characters in the context of the codes, signs and monolithic phonemes contained in theatrical language and their social pragmatics in the play 'Aashadh ka Ek Din'. An attempt has been made to analyze the meaning, sound and effect hidden in the dialogues of theatrical language.



Keywords— Code language & Style, Play (Drama), Pragmatics, Theatrical Language, Tone

INTRODUCTION

Play (Drama) is a living experience that gets its vibrancy on the theatre itself. Although drama, like other literary genres, is also a medium of linguistic expression and being worded, the expressive power of language will be given as much importance in it as in a story or novel, but even if it is worded, it cannot be called blank literature. Being interactive, the verbal element (interactive language) becomes the main element in the play. The play reaches from creator to director, from director to actor and from actor to audience, and in this journey, language plays an important role. On this platform the uniqueness, originality, complexity, every aspect of the play starts to become apparent. In this context the concept of theatrical language becomes important, because it is the theatre that communicates the play to the observer through various colour devices. A play is composed on two levels. The first time, when the play is written and the second time, when it is staged. Therefore, a new language that is created in this process of staging is called theatre language. In fact, the basic purpose of any composition is communication in other

literary genres, language plays an important role in this communicability and through this, the composition works to awaken the thought while making space in the reader's mind. But in the context of drama, this language assumes a special form and becomes "theatre language" which proves the meaning of drama through various paralinguistic concepts. We can say that colour and paralinguistic language is a kind of coordination and adjustment and it is not a fixed or static language. It is constantly changing and so there is always scope for new additions and improvements. Dr. Girish Rastogi expresses this in his words :

"Theatre is not a ready-made language, it is a freshly synthesized language. We can experience it only in its totality, a totality and synthesis that is not predetermined. Many creative elements, many art forms, subtle aesthetic experiences come and join it, they also become integrated in it and also keep on giving themselves independent experience."

In other words, the design of the theatre language of a play involves many elements. It does not remain limited to words but expands on a wide spectrum and includes different mediums and aspects within the language. At the creative level, a language is born in the form of theatre through which even abstract ideas find meaningful expression. It is worth mentioning here that the theatre language of a play can be studied and analyzed on the basis of various components and patterns.

HEADINGS

Language and Interactive Structure of the Drama

These can be considered as a basic component of the composition of theatre language, because it is a fundamental truth that drama is a literal art despite all the colourful and non-linguistic mediums. Although it is true that drama is visual-poetic and therefore its language is not merely a language of terms nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, etc.—it expresses itself with the expressive abilities of visual-legislation, acting, and colour-elements, but in fact whatever emerges as a visual in the form of drama on the stage, It is dependent on language and emerges between the line of the language. From this point of view, the importance of the language and interactive structure of the play increases for the study of theatre in the context of language.

Language is a comprehensive system of expression and communication. In the absence of language, not only the social but also personal status of man becomes useless. Dandi has said this keeping in mind the importance of language

*Idmandhatamh kritsnanm jaayet
bhuvanrayam,*

*Yadi shabdahvyam jyotish sansaram n
dipyate*

Broadly, languages are those means which are used in human society for exchange of ideas, but under linguistics, language does not take such a broad meaning but is called "the group of meaningful sounds emanating from the human mouth, by which people of particular society exchange thoughts with each other. "

In fact, "the language of drama is the language of life with which the emotional feelings, postures, actions and situations of the human mind are always connected, so it contains the echo of the notes of sensation different from the language of the book, which comes alive with the actor's evocations. In fact, there is enough truth in the statement that the language of the play leaves considerable margins."²

Theatrical language is embedded in dialogues and the dialogues depend on the speaker and listener according to the expectations of the genre. In this process, one message is sent/passed and the other receives it. A general reference code for the message must be physical presence, psychological status, etc. Thus, contextual interpretation of language depends on code, code style, code tone. In the words of Dr. Ravindranath Shrivastava "The message of the speaker and the listener is predisposed to the code which is almost identical or similar in nature in terms of the linguistic consciousness and knowledge of the speaker and listener. There is a context to the message which can be said to be a connotation of the elements of the external and internal world. For the transmission of codes and messages, there is a medium of physical or mental connection between the speaker and the listener, which becomes a means of establishing contact between them".^{3f}

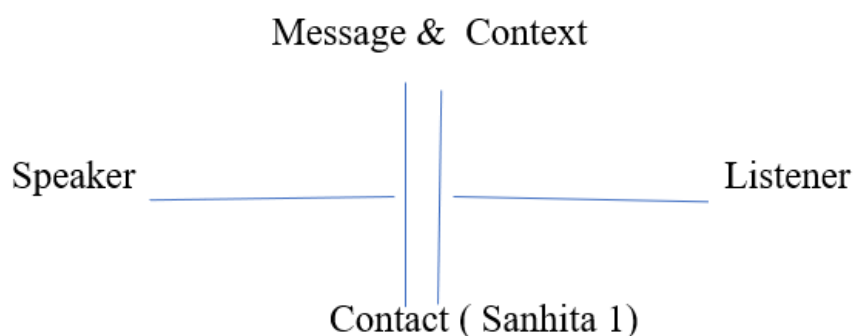


Fig.1

In a play, the character moves from one code to another depending on the participant, the characters, the country, the atmosphere, the verb, the context and the dramatic situation. Language is the product of action and

action is the product of language. All this situation is not mechanical, in which the element of individuality is no less important.

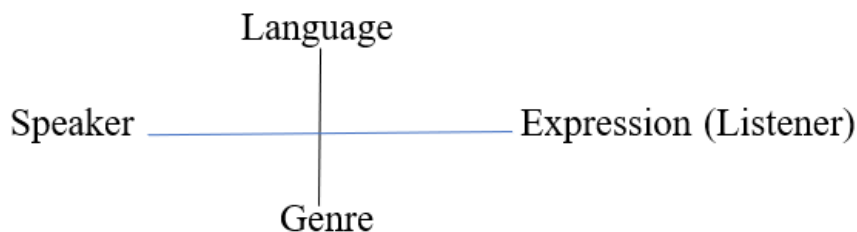
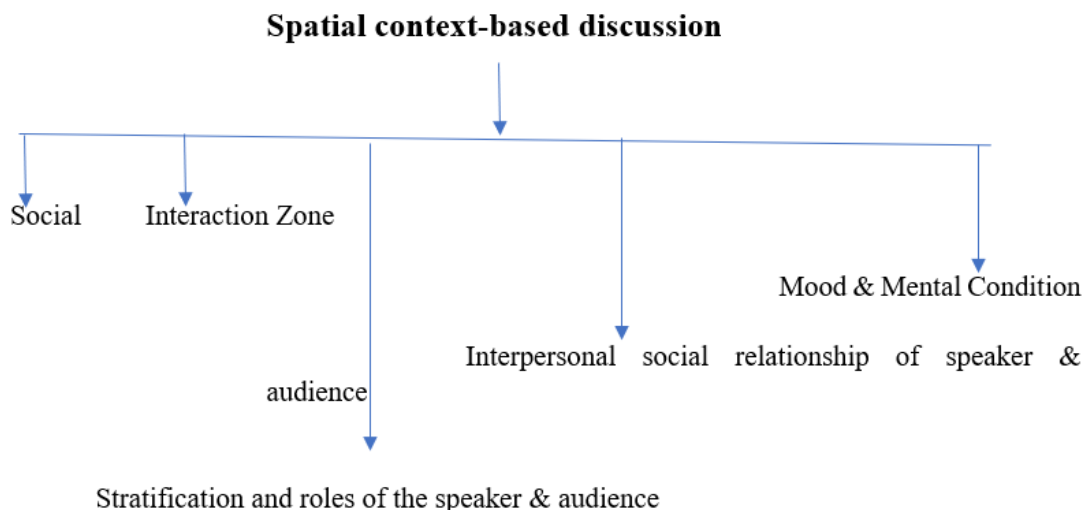


Fig.2



Social interaction zone
(Through house objects in symbolic form)

Fig.3

1. A Burning Lamp (Indicative of Mallika's Life)
2. Bhojpatra wrapped in silk cloth (symbolizing the spirit of Mallika)
3. Stag cub (symbol of sensitive heart)
4. Matul's broken leg (the result of greed for material life)
5. In the second and third numbers, the flash of lightning, deep darkness, intense clouds, thunder, the word of rain (Mallika's pain, inner pain, a symbol of unhappy life)
6. Mallika's blank pages (an indicator of her hope and waiting)
7. Swastika, conch and lotus symbols on the walls
8. Scattered birch leaves
9. Broken Modha
10. Torn garment with stitches
11. Broken Aquarius
- 12 Two inked pots near the stove

Social conditions of the speaker audience and their interrelationship

(Dramatic preference order)

1. Kalidas
2. Mallika
3. Ambika
4. Vilom
5. Maatul
6. Priyangumanjri
7. Dantul
8. Nikeshp
9. Rangini
10. Sangini
11. Anuswar
12. Anunasik

Reciprocal Social Relationship of Speaker Audience & Mood and Mental Condition :

The medium of expression is code, that is, if the expression of ideas is done through a linguistic medium, then it is called code. Language is a system of relationships between

different elements of composition and non-individual mediums.

In the language of drama, it is important how much they match our experiences and possibilities. There is no doubt that there is variety in the language of the play due to social reality. There is a difference in the application of language due to innumerable factors such as context, scope, character position, aptitude, attitude, relationship formula.

The code language of Aashadh ka ek din drama is Hindi Sanskritised and that language is mandatory for that background. Despite being a Sanskrit language, this play is successful in conveying its communication to the general audience. Along with the formation of the Natya Bhasha, this play is an example of a language that has poetic fluidity and vibrancy that brings poetic experience and dramatization closer. The poetic form of the language of the play, which is like Mallika, immersed in the emotional flow and with a poetic personality like Kalidasa, is also necessary. On the first day of Ashadha, when Mallika comes drenched in rain with Kalidasa, the sweetness of poetic narration is reflected in that description.

("Neelkamal ki tarah komal aur Aadra, vaayu ki tarah halka aur swapna ki

tarah chitramay. Main chahti thi use apne mein bhar loon aur aankhein moond loon ")

Soft and gentle like the blue lotus, light like the wind and pictorial like a dream.

I wanted to stuff it in myself and close my eyes."

4

Rakesh's first and real identity of theatrical language is the deep connection between language and physical activity with language and state of mind. Mallika's taking the book, keeping, in the first issue of the play itself, Ambika's taking a long breath looking at the window while cracking paddy in the chhaj and the opposite of lighting the extinguished lamp with fire wood, says a lot in unspoken words. Mohan Rakesh has also said, "The real act of words does not lie in words but in between words... I think the language of Ashadha ka ek Din is more phonetic, symbolic and takes many forms because there are many modern allusions to this play. There are many satires on current situations, ironies and today's questions – there are different types of characters, so the language is different in its composition despite being the same."⁵

The weaving of words and sounds in the language of this play to depict emotions and scenes such as conceit, satire, pain, euphemism, annoyance, simplicity, etc. is remarkable.

(Nahi, tum kashi nahi gaye. Tumne sanyas nahi liya. maine isliye tumse jane ke liye kaha tha....maine isliye

nahi kaha tha ki tum jakar kahin ka shashan bhar sambhalo)

(No, you didn't go to Kashi. You did not retire. I asked you to leave... I did not say that you should go and take charge of somewhere)⁶

In this play, Rakesh has not only chosen the appropriate words according to the context of the NAME, but has also given its full meaning because here the words are related to the state of mind, conflict and character of the character. Rakesh 'NAME' has presented a good example of semantic contagion by holding the same word from place to place.

Ambika : (Yah kaisi vichadhara kai?) What kind of ideology is this?

Nikeshep : (Vichakshanta) Reflection ?

Ambika : (Vichakshanta to hai) There is a deliberation.

Nikeshep : (Isme Vichakshanta kya hai Ambika?) What is the objectivity in it?⁷

All Ambika's hatred, resentment, all her feelings towards Kalidasa are embodied in this word. Here's how Om Shivpuri expresses his views about Rakesh's theatrical language as an actor: The man had a sense of what vocabulary could describe today's total rhythm. Not a single word of his plays is artificial. Put all three of his plays together to see how the man is searching for language ⁸

In conclusion, this play by Mohan Rakesh presents the theatrical language in an original and creative manner.

Code-style - There are two distinctions of code style :

(+) **Application** (-) **Contrivance**

(+) The application includes specific use of language and not general such as 'Your Majesty' for a judge, 'My Lord', words and phrases about justice, large compound sentences, etc.

One Day of Ashadha, the style of all the characters of the play is visible in different forms. In style form, language is expressed in the form of formal-informal, elegant, vulgar encouragement, etc.

(++) **Respect** (--) **Affinity**

On the arrival of Rangini and Sangini, Mallika's statement that – Yes – Yes . Let's... Have you come to my place? ⁹

and

Priya says to Mallika to welcome Priyanganjari, "I do not know how to treat you? If you take the seat, then I will take it for you.... "¹⁰

Both the above statements (++) are expressing a sense of respect, and so affinity was missing. In formal relationship and situations when a person wants to draw a boundary with Speaker or listener, he/she talks with additional respect. So Talks between Mallika and Priyan

(+) Veneration (-) Intimacy & Affinity

Ambika's statement to Matul, "Mallika bring a seat from inside for Matul"¹¹

and

Mallika hears that Priyangumanjari has ordered the cremation of her house and says-

"You are very generous. But we are used to living in such a house, so there is no inconvenience."¹²

There is general respect for Priyangumanjari and Matul where any kind of affinity or intimacy was absent.

(0) Respect (+) Ignorance

Dialogue between Anusvar and Anunasik

Anusvar: Yes, it's done. Isn't it? Why resonant?

Nasal - Yes, it is done, only one look remains.

In the said dialogue, the sense of respect is manifested in an even position.

(-) Respect (+) Annoyance

Mallika: Arya Antonym This time and place is not for all these things. I wasn't expecting to see you here at this time.¹³

Ambika - yes, I see. That's why I'm saying. The penchant and lining are for human beings to sleep, not to animals.¹⁴

The above statements do not imply a sense of respect. Therefore, (-) is respect.

(- -) Respect (++) Hatred & Annoyance

Kalidasa's statement on the stranger Dantula suddenly entering Mallika's house: As far as I know, we are not acquainted. How dare you come into a stranger's house?"¹⁵

and

Ambika asks Vilom to leave her house – "Go away, Vilom. You know you're here..."¹⁶

Disrespect is an emotion – so (--) there will be negative respect

All the creativity of the theatrical language is in the use of words, in the composition of that language, which is full of different fluctuations, different rhythms and tones, with diverse gestures of acting.

Ashadh Ka Ek Din Even if the external outline of the personality of all the characters in the play is not described, then from the tone and rhythm of their dialogues, their personality can be easily discovered from inside to outside, the whole state of mind, the acting style of all in the group of words coming out of their mouths, in their combination. The tone changes according to the personality of each character. Though the language is the same—some places are worth seeing, especially the clash of Kalidasa and Dantul in the first issue—the strong personality of the poet on the one hand, the inner conflict of the royal class on the other. Tones are revealed by the sounds of words duality, satire, pain, simplicity and crookedness. The same is the case with the dialogues of Kalidasa and Vilom.

Kalidasa: Even the interruption of the year does not distance the opposite from the opposite. I'm curious to hear your question.

Vilom: I want to know if you are still the same Kalidasa, aren't you?"¹⁷

Priyangumanjari's mirror, majestic, personality, on the other hand, her inner disappointment, defeat and nervousness in front of Mallika is very well evident from the author's wordplay and tone.

"Most of my time is spent in the hope that their extended stage does not go back. It takes a lot of hard work, it . "

"Don't you understand that?"¹⁸

Ambika's tone conveys a mixture of tremor, stiffness, distraction, anguish and anxiety produced by the pain of the mother's heart.

Tomorrow your mother's body will not be left, and there will be no one-time meal in the house, so how will you answer the question that will arise before you. Will emotion solve that question?¹⁹ The dialogues of the anusvara-nasik clearly show how miraculously the different confluences of the word are produced by chance in particular rhythm and tone.

CONCLUSION

Rakesh's belief and vision are evident from these essential points of the play that- "For any emotional communication, the composition is not of words, but of some sounds in a particular rhythm. The creative use of words can find new rhythms in the rhythm of those contexts."²⁰ Thus, different expressions of the same subject are formed according to the tone. Code and tone are of great importance in the play. It is not independent in the play as it connects to its entire context. Therefore, creative theatre creates language and language creates creative theatre which opens up new possibilities of pragmatics and semantic contexts. Girish

Rastogi has said that "I'm looking for a language that's visual, that's a stage language. Language should be more direct, more life-giving and with words in their impact, it can be far more powerful as well as give a new form to old stories."²¹ In conclusion, it can be said that many tangible and intangible elements play their role in the composition of theatre language, but none of these elements are independent in themselves. They synthesize with the play, connect with the entire context and play their role in totality. It is the order of harmony and tension between all these creative elements that forms the characteristic and characteristic of the theatre language.

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Birth of New Nationalism: Politics of Control during the COVID-19 Lockdown, in the Selective Short Stories of Udayan Mukherjee

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Abstract— *This paper intends to study politics of Nationalism, representation and control in India during COVID pandemic. It will express how this pandemic time give state an opportunity of control and a new narrative of Nationalism. By analysing, selective short stories of Udayan Mukherjee, this research will find different layers of control to hide it's failure to fulfil the basic needs. Using Louis Althusser's theories of Ideological State Apparatus, Repressive State Apparatus, Base and Superstructures, the paper will search, how a new image of India emerges to people's mind. This research will explore the identities like, Dom community, Migrant Workers, Local Vendors, and house maids etc.*



Keywords— *Covid 19, Nationalism, Control, Ideological State Apparatus, Repressive State Apparatus.*

Introduction

Niccolo Machiavelli in his book *The Prince* says, “a prince ought, above all things, always endeavour in every action to gain for himself the reputation of being a great remarkable man.” (Machiavelli 95). He later adds that “a prince ought to entertain the people with festivals and spectacles at convenient season of the year...and show himself an example of courtesy and liberality” (97). This paper traces the politics behind lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic to ideologically reconstruct the mass identity of a new nation in Udayan Mukherjee's book *Essential items* selected short stories: “A Life or Death Situation”, “Shelter from the Storm”, “Homecoming”, and “The Stroll”. It depicts the ways that the state uses to unite and control the masses during such Sensitive time and its incapacity to resist the disease. In such a scenario, technology, media, and medical science have been used by the state to create an invisible fear and force mass identities to follow the nation. Here in this short story collection, the writer gives various points of view and shows the idea of lockdown and pandemic is politically motivated. He shows how people are forcefully being moved to their homeland because of

diseases and poverty. The Nation, under the guise of a pandemic and lockdown is destroying the small ‘bases’ to make new ‘superstructures’. Thus, the nation first does not acknowledge the jobless identities, and then, with its ideological and repressive state apparatus, makes them a new National property.

Socio-Political Background

Covid has an immense effect on socio-economic condition of new India. This crisis moment opens up multiple possibilities for India to make a huge change in their geo political policies. According to the reports at almost 5 lakhs peoples died and much more affected in Covid. A, BBC report says India is emerging as a new superstructure in recent times therefore Prime Minister will not accept the loss in such crucial time. On the other hand, vote become a major issue as COVID-19 pushes Indian politics to look alternative ways of mobilisation. State uses this existential crisis moment to dominate over the masses through Repressive and Ideological State Apparatuses. This paper expresses the ways in which the state controls the masses to hide their failure and bring them under the control of the

nation. It also questions on those unplanned policies and their devastating effect on common human.

India as an emerging country lacks the proper medical system. According to recent estimates, India not only faces a shortage of roughly 600,000 doctors and 2 million nurses in primary care ("India Facing a Shortage of 600,000 Doctors and Two Million Nurses," 2019), but also a shortage of testing kits. The government as well as research institutions had begun developing and producing their own testing kits. But state is not ready to accept it, rather it uses doctors and their dedication as a face to hide the dark truths. Not only that the panic of COVID-19 has been spread such a way that every death has been suspected as COVID. However, deaths have not been classified according to diseases and bodies have been thrown to Ganges unidentified.

The incapacity of state reaches at peak when monsoon season brings Cyclone Amphan to the eastern coast of India, near the major city of Kolkata in West Bengal (Agarwal, 2020). An estimated eighty people were killed in a region where more than 130 million people reside. Thousands were left homeless, with residents grappling with the decision to stay at home and risk lacking supplies, or seek help from a crowded shelter and risk of infection from cyclone shelters, some of which were partially converted into COVID-19 quarantine centres ("Amphan: India and Bangladesh Evacuate millions Ahead of Super Cyclone," 2020). It washes away all the fragile barriers of lockdown and quarantine centres and questions on the security system.

In this situation, the state uses apparatuses to gain the favour of the common people. Prime Minister Modi announced the national lockdown in March 2020. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a Rs 20 lakh crore (US\$307 billion) stimulus package. At the beginning of the pandemic, unemployment was at 23.5 percent in India, but by mid-June it was down to 8.5 percent. In addition to cash transfers, of 500 billion rupees (US\$6.7 million) to women and farmers, and subsidized food grains, which supplied 800 million people. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGA) was critical in mitigating Unemployment issues. MGNREGA was passed in 2005 under Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh and provides at least one hundred days of guaranteed wages.

At this time, the state influences religious institutions to propagate religion. Although the langar was initially serving forty thousands of meals a day in Gurdwaras (Sikh religious sites) during the pandemic across India, as is typical practice, by June 2020, the Sikh community in Delhi had served roughly fifteen thousand people living in informal housing using a "langar On

wheels" (Agrawal, 2020; "Coronavirus Warriors: Amid Lockdown, Gurudwara Bangla Sahib Is Serving 40,000 Meals a Day," 2020). In fact, upon recognizing Migrant workers were not able to benefit from the national stimulus package. Because of restrictions in identification processes, the "langar on wheels" also started providing food to migrant workers in 1946 and recommended a publicly financed health service. Government institutions are responsible for Administration in rural villages, including the establishment of health and wellness centers and education, agriculture, and transportation (Tikkanen et al., 2020; "WHO DG Praises PM Modi, Health Minister Nadda for the Ayushman Bharat Scheme," 2019). The nation and its rulers felt desperate to retain lockdown. Police has been used as the controller of this; even some states, such as Odisha, used infrastructure previously. Maharashtra monitored physical distance during lockdown by using drones. The desperateness to control can be seen in many actions of State authorities; a news in THE TIMES OF INDIA says how migrant workers are tortured in the hand of police for disobeying the lockdown. Such instances questions States role to protect people in the pandemic.

Covid Politics: The Rules of Life versus the Reality of Life.

Udayan Mukherjee is an Indian journalist and editor of CNBC India from Seetla, Uttarakhand. He wrote a fiction novel titled "Dark Circles". Mental health was a key issue he wanted to address in the book. However, in 2021, Mukherjee made a comeback with the India Today Group, joining their business channel, 'Business Today'. Mukherjee has authored three books during his time off the studio. "Death in the Himalayas" is a fiction book in the mystery genre. "Dark Circles" is a fiction novel about mental health issues. "Essential Items": Stories from a Land in Lockdown is a collection of short stories that he wrote during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Essential Items" is a remarkable illustration of the COVID-19 pandemic in Indian society, dealing with different classes. Each story depicts reality with a certain blend of pain and humour and takes the reader to those unforgettable years. The writer, through these stories tries to paint a complete picture of the pandemic, where everyone can see his image of suffering. The book sets up the immediate outbreak of COVID and the first lockdown, which opens up different emotions. For the sake of research, I have selected four stories in chronological order as per their theme to show the preparation of the migration (A Life or Death Situation), the way of journey (Shelter from the Storm), the return to home (Homecoming), and the conditions in the lockdown (The Stroll).

The first story, “A Life or Death Situation”, opens with a holocaust situation where two domes, Kallu and Shibu, are preparing for a cremation secretly at night due to lockdown. They seem very active because this is their first cremation after three days. After the cremation, they are paid satisfying money by the son of the dead father. They drink and enjoy the money, discussing the changing times and their condition at this time. Suddenly another dom comes running and informs them that two people died in a nearby old-age home. The owner of the old-age home has absconded himself. So, these doms demand enormous money for cremation and have been paid immediately into bank accounts by the families behind the phone. After the cremation, they plan to migrate for their burdensome profession. They want to return to their village and lead an agrarian life, in spite of knowing they will never meet again.

In these story, those two doms are suffering between humanity and professionalism. They talk about people dying less and their professions dying. But on the other hand, they are migrant workers who have come to this Kashighat in search of work. But during this time of return, they secured enough money for the pandemic years. Afterwards in the story, they demand huge amounts of money that are immoral at this sensitive and mournful time; probably they will never return after the pandemic.

Another story named “Shelter from the Storm” has its setting in COVID 19, where migrant labourers are on their way home. The story opens with an old Zamindar family trying to recover their past glories. After a fearful storm at night, the servant comes to survey the condition of the house and the mango grove. Here we see the son of old Malik and his granddaughter, who have come out to see and collect the mangos. At that moment, readers cannot find any kind of reference to COVID migration. Later, a huge amount of migrant labours enter in Rajbari in hope of shelter and food. Though Malik initially refuses, but Didimoni’s childish innocence melts the ice. Finally, migrant labourers have been served food twice. The story ends with an optimistic tone that everything will be well again. There is no mention of a person dying of COVID anywhere in the book; instead, people who are afraid of COVID assume that death is caused by the virus. No food security was provided by the state during the migration, even with shelter during the storm. Here we can see two classes of people and their reactions; one is enjoying the vacation, and the other suffers.

In the story “Homecoming”, the narrator is returning home as a migrant saver with enjoyment to meet his family after long days. He gives little attention to those who quit following but becomes astonished to see the train and stations being deserted. After returning home, he feels

alienated and isolated in his home. He thinks of being polluted and of the bringer of the disease at home. His father is also a migrant worker. He gives him advice about the volatile lives of migrant workers. He describes how they depend on the masters, who can throw them out at any moment. Then he plans to buy cows, harvest their land, and become a farmer at this time. On the other hand, his wife and father inform him about the PM promise in radio about that, it will reposition those migrant workers, and the state will give loans to this person for a new business.

Another story, “The Stroll”, depicts the consequences of COVID on the common working class and migrating people. The story shares the experience of a writer who, after long days of being locked down, once visited a local market. Here, he saw everything has changed since his golden days, and the police are always serving over the lockdown. He went to the market and met his known fisherwoman. He asked her about his other known vendors. She informed him that due to this lockdown all are migrating from here to another place for better opportunities, and others have changed their profession rather some new members have come. The story narrative tries to connect those people who have made their contribution to his life. He can buy those products online, but he chooses to stand with them physically by buying the items from them. But the story also opens with a question about covid impact on class division where narrator, belonging to upper the class, enjoys the food variations and recipes and also comes to buy a pomphret, which portrays the original scenario.

Ideological State Apparatus

Louis Althusser was a French Marxist philosopher who lived from 1918 to 1990. He was associated with the Structural Marxism movement and his work focused on the relationship between ideology, politics, and society. Althusser developed the concept of Ideological state apparatus to describe the various institutions and practices in society that serve to reproduce and reinforce domination ideologies and power structures. Althusser was interested in the ways in which individuals were shaped and influenced by social structures and ideologies. He argued that individuals were not autonomous subjects, but rather were constituted by their position within social structures. Althusser believed that class struggle was not just an economic or political phenomenon, but was also a struggle over the meanings and values that shaped society. He argued that ideology played a crucial role in this struggle, and that dominant ideologies could be challenged and transformed through political action and cultural resistance. Althusser explains how state controls human identity through religious, educational, legal, political, cultural,

psychological, ISA. This ISA is a set of doctrine that ruled people believed to be their ideology. Ideology is a set of ideas that state or institution imposes to follow by the community. Thus, it controls even the daily rules and Philosophy of life.

‘Interpellation’ is Althusser’s term for the way the individual is encouraged to see himself as an entity free and independent of social forces. Actually, it is described as how people unconsciously support the party. These stories express the pathetic condition of the commons, but they have other layers too. The state, in the name of the pandemic, controls the masses.

Repressive State Apparatus

Repressive state apparatus is the way that state uses to implement their ideas through power. The state uses Apparatus to control the mass identities of them, and with the help of authorities, like legal, police, and medical authorities, it forcefully shut down even those places where there are no single cases of covid. Police plays a major role in maintaining lockdown. Police the agent of State not only implements lockdown but also poverty. Many places in India and in the stories Police has been located to take bribes from commons, they take Vasuli events from the vendors of the market during lockdown; they ask money from drivers; they became the weapons of the nation to impose lockdown and poverty. Thus, in the story of the stroll, we can see how the police take bribes from local markets. One local fishwali, Jayshree, says, “What else? They get away with it with the vegetable vendors, not us. We are locals; they can’t bully us that easily” (Mukherjee 195).

The medical system was also being used by nations for the purpose of locating and isolating these peoples from others. We can see how fever becomes the symbol of disease, sin and fear for both self and other. In the story “Homecoming” we can see how Asha women were appointed to locate the migrant and disease peoples. It is not known about the disease, but its effects create a fear of following the rules imposed by the state. The narrator of the story “Homecoming”, feels like a slaughterhouse animal waiting to be butchered. On the other side, it feels dehumanizing and polluted that in “A Shelter from the storm” a shramik train has been appointed by the state for the migrant labour, which labels them as diseased and outcasts. In the story of a “Life-or-death situation”, we can see how a doctor is making fake certificates for money, as they say, “10 to Bishu doctor for the death certificates—tell him to put heart attack, stroke, or something serious” (Mukherjee 18). Throughout the pandemic years, no clear

information has been given to people about COVID, but the nation gives some rules to follow.

New Nationalism

The authority is trying to control the mass identities to make a new nation. For that nation wants to erase the individual identities and bring them under nation’s command. A sense of being polluted has been implemented for all the migrant labourers by the state. COVID has been represented as a moral failure or fate rather than a failure of the state. The state uses the idea of home as an emotional weapon to imprison both the body and mind of common people. In the story “Holidays” the owner of the maid says it is a paid holiday for the working class to go and enjoy it, but after reaching home, she understands the home has become an isolation camp without enough money, a holiday joblessness state. Covid has been named the China virus and foreigners as the bearers of the disease. By some of the state’s agents foreigners has been treated badly because of his nationality. The story “Border Town” shows the fall of economy of tourism in India and its great impact on the local village. The story “Essential Items” opens the mask of some self-help groups that are helping in this condition because of their position. The state gives money to women and old men to control them for some uncertain reason, and the poor people believe in a moment of crisis (Homecoming).

Throughout the books, we can see how the idea of home has been implemented. As Kallu says, “he will work on the field, grow stuff, and figure out what can be done in that village. He does not need much—just enough for dal roti” (Mukherjee 31). The state, with the help of electronic media, ideologically controls the mass community. In the story “Homecoming”, we see how radio became the only source of entertainment for lower-middle-class people and also mode of control. Nation silently forces people to choose digital media for giving rise to the national identity. The shops for essential items have been closed, and online delivery has been motivated by the state. In the story “Essential items” the state forcefully imposes online marketing in the name of the COVID pandemic. In the story “The Stroll” Varun knew that all of this could be ordered online or fetched by Ramu, but there was something about a vibrant marketplace that he had always found attractive.

Religious State Apparatus

We can see how the state uses religious apparatus to divide and control the masses. India has emerged as a Hindu country in the eyes of the world and people in recent times. In these stories, we can see how the state is emotionally connecting people with authority and using the crisis movement. State implements are mere religious structures. As we can see, people are being advised to see the

Ramayana and follow the norms to be safe from the class of viruses. The Epic bears the code of control as state become the symbol of Ram who to follow (Holidays). Later, we can see, even at the time of death, the religious identity of the corpses has been asked. The authority is cautious about the cremation of a Muslim corps in Kashi near Ganga (A Life-or-death situation). But the religious state apparatus is so powerful in India that we can see unidentified corpses being thrown in the sacred river Ganga, even at a crucial time, in the hope of Moksha. One BBC report says that the holiest river in India is swollen with bodies.

Base and Superstructures

Throughout the lockdown years we can see how small factors have been destroyed during the pandemic, and there is no possibility of return; rather, a new culture has been created by the state. The state wants a huge gap between two classes; it tries to erase the link between the two classes. Here in the stories, one class of people is accepting the internet world, while the other turns to the agrarian world. Thus, the state is demolishing one class of people and forcefully taking them under control. Migrants return to their homes for a secure and simple life and surrender to the destruction of small bases.

In one way, when the state is destroying bases, it makes new superstructures to follow. During this time, the state controls even the space of entertainment to ideologically provoke them. The COVID period has seen a rapid growth of new cultures coming into prominence, such as work from home, regionalism, the revival of tradition, nationalism, etc. The state gives loans to poor people as help, but those unable to return take the small base in the story "Homecoming".

In the story Shelter from the Storm, we can see the revival of the Zamindar family and traditional Durga Puja simultaneously with a deep fascination for Zamindar by migrant workers. The rising price is also an important factor in these cases. In the story, "The Stroll", we see how a rich buyer stimulates the price to rise and gives notable value to some essential values in such an epidemic.

CONCLUSION

As the years go by, authority is grappling with the commons in new ways. With the rapid growth of electronic media, space is synchronizing day by day. Readers can be undetermined about the RSA and ISA hidden in it, but the writer hints at those dark truths that are in the story. The writer shows how society implements those for the common human being, but in the present situation, there is a different discourse. Literature, with its eternity keeps everything at its core and reflect in the demand of time. There are many

famous texts on pandemic and state's control, even some are dystopian. We know "Big Brother", "Handmaids", "The Plague", and "The Trial" but here, state is making an imaginary world where common people are victims, and a state with great modesty helps us and makes us believe in that time of crisis. Here, Big Brother comes out of the fictional world and convinces us that he is with us in this situation. The stories tell us how we are being controlled even in pandemic situations to make a new human or a new nation, and we are following it knowingly or unknowingly. Thus COVID-19 gives a new view to judge our ideas belongs to ourselves. It search COVID effect on human identity, 'a pre or post pandemic human'.

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Santhal Community: The Nature-Preserving Souls Amidst the Cruel Human-Destructive Forces

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Abstract— Human beings are considered to be the offsprings of nature but this relation is paradoxical in my point of view. Though people argue that they love nature they are filled with direct cruelty. Nature and natural resources are mostly harmed by the human agencies. So, human day to day activities are more like an anathema to the mother nature. The mass destruction of the mother nature is serving as a global problem now a days. Amidst all these destructive forces Santal Community people are doing their best to preserve the nature. They are born and brought up in the lap of nature. Nature is worshipped and celebrated by these people whom we term as marginalized communities and think they are obsolete. The paper examines the Santhal communities' nature centered worldviews, practices and folk knowledge that majorly serves as living system of conservation. In addition, the paper also argues that Santhal ecological custodianship is neither romantic nostalgia nor a static tradition but an adaptable, collective governance ethic that persists despite systemic pressure.



Keywords— Santhal Community, Ecological Custodianship, Indigenous Environmental Ethics, Nature-Centered Worldview, Sustainable Conservation Practices.

Human progress, celebrated in terms of industrial growth and technological advancement, has often come at the expense of ecological balance. Deforestation, mining, industrial waste, and unsustainable agricultural practices have pushed the planet toward environmental collapse. We ourselves are destroying a planet that we inherit. Modern day's activities further have aggravated the situation. Human agencies themselves have unleashed the planetary crisis both knowingly and unknowingly in several cases. If we think critically a bit, we can understand that from the morning to night whatever we do is not at all favourable for our mother nature. Many Indian writings have dawned upon the issue and both in direct and indirect ways have criticized the actions of modern human beings which have reached its apex in harming nature. Gieve Patel's poem "On Killing a Tree" inculcates the relentlessness of human beings by cutting down the trees in brutal ways and presents the issue in a satirical way. We, in the name of development, are propelling our planet towards destruction and decay. Joyjit Ghosh and Sk Tarik Ali in their essay "Can I become a

tree?": Plant Imagination in Contemporary Indian Poetry In English quote several lines from Ayappa Panikkar's poem "Where are the Woods, My children?" and assert, "The lines mourn for the loss of woods, the meadows, and the wild expanse of nature as mankind has destroyed everything and defamiliarized the face of the earth" (6). Human agencies take no pity in ravaging their own planet as deforestation and urbanization become their first priority. Their cruelty against the nature has reached its culmination and it is the high time when we all should be aware of it to warn people and mankind as a whole against their thoughtless activity and exploitation of nature. Human beings do owe reparation to their mother nature.

Amidst this ecological crisis, indigenous communities like the Santhals (or Santals) emerge as exemplary models of coexistence with nature. Their culture, rituals, and livelihood are interwoven with natural cycles, ensuring sustainability and respect for ecological diversity. Indigenous people in India always have a close relation to

nature and they worship natural objects and celebrates nature. Ghosh and Ali again write, “Some Adivasi societies in India during the Karam festival (a kind of harvest ceremony) worship the Karam plant as a god” (2). We are living in a capitalist era where everyday we can experience the exploitation of nature and natural resources. The industrial expansion has led to the ecological imbalance and mineral resources are in a way plundered. This not only has brought destruction to mother nature but also the destitution of indigenous inhabitants. Indigenous people are closely connected to the forests. They have a harmonious bonding with the nature and their requirements and necessities are filled regularly by the natural resources which surround them. The city-centric people still term these people as uncultured and uncivilized but probably they bear more sense than us in preserving the nature. Suklal Saren in his essay *The Role of Santal Indigenous Knowledge for Environment Conservation and Global Integration* writes, “Indigenous communities like to live peacefully in the lap of forest” (470).

The Santhals are the largest tribe in the Jharkhand and West Bengal states in terms of population and are also found in the states of Odisha, Bihar, Assam and Tripura. They form an ethnic group of Indian subcontinents (“Santal people”). Santhal cosmology does not perceive nature as an inert resource but as a living entity. Trees, rivers, hills, and animals are not merely objects of utility but sacred companions in their journey of life. Their festivals, such as Baha Parab (flower festival), are dedicated to the worship of trees and blossoms, reflecting gratitude toward seasonal renewal. Marine Carrin, in his essay *Santal indigenous knowledge, cultural heritage and the politics of representation*, writes “The Santals continue to imagine their existence as linked to the flora around them” (1457). Santhal agriculture itself is guided by ecological prudence. Instead of commercial monoculture, they often practice mixed cropping, which maintains soil fertility and reduces the risk of depletion. Their non-exploitative hunting and fishing methods emphasize balance rather than dominance. Uttaran Dutta, in his essay *Protecting Sacred-groves: Community-led Environmental Organizing by Santhals of Eastern India*, writes “...indigenous people, particularly the Santhals, considered Nature as inseparable from their identity and worldviews” (1).

Contrastingly, dominant human civilization has sought to “conquer” nature. Colonial exploitation of forests for timber, followed by post-independence industrial projects, uprooted Santhal communities and devastated their environment. Mining in Jharkhand, West Bengal, and Odisha has displaced countless Santhals, leading to deforestation, soil erosion, and pollution of rivers. Mega-dams have submerged their lands, severing their ties with

ancestral landscapes. In this context Suklal Saren again mentions Ramachandra Guha’s article in the book *Forestry in British and Post-British India* and interpolates that his article “describes the exploitation of forest for railway expansion and industrial development in the colonial era depredated indigenous forest dwellers by both Indian and European private contractors” (471). Global consumerism adds to this destruction: plastic pollution, fossil-fuel dependency, and rampant deforestation have pushed ecosystems to the brink of collapse. Unlike Santhal restraint, mainstream development rests upon extraction and commodification of every natural element.

Sacred groves, known as *Jaher Than*, are central to Santhal villages, preserved as untouched forest patches where no exploitation is permitted. These practices ensure the conservation of biodiversity and the protection of ecosystems. Carrin asserts, “each grove comprises a wide range of ecological diversity. It is forbidden to cut trees from a Jaher, seen as the abode of the village deities. Even the dead branches should not be used and the place must be protected from any polluting intrusion, such as pregnant and menstruating women” (1458). The sacred groves play a crucial role in the lives of the Santhals. These groves have an excessive medicinal value. So, the groves must be protected by any means. Generally Sacred Groves are constituted of trees and shrubs that are of rare variety. Not only the community people but also any other people from other society are not allowed to cut trees from this grove. Sacred Groves are linked to the identity of the Santhals and they perform their rituals and festivals, such as weddings and birth rituals there. They consider that the Sacred Grove is the abode of their deity and no ritual should begin without the blessing of the presiding deity. Parikshit Chakraborty in his essay *Socio-Cultural Aspect of Sacred groves: The Study in a Santhal Village* writes, “since the local santal people believe that their idols or deities to be present in the Grove and displayed by the trees, shrubs and stones for which they want the sacred grove remain intact. These beliefs give the idea of bonding between the people and nature” (51). The belief that disturbing Sacred Groves angers deities, functions as a social mechanism for ecological preservation. Santhal songs often portray rivers as mothers, forests as protectors, and land as the embodiment of life.

The stark contrast between Santhal ecological ethics and modern destructive forces invites a rethinking of development paradigms. The Santhal worldview critiques the anthropocentric arrogance of mainstream society and highlights an alternative rooted in reciprocity and reverence. If industrial civilization represents exploitation, the Santhals represent preservation; if the former thrives on alienation from the natural world, the latter flourishes in intimacy with it. Thadeus Hembrom in his essay *A study of*

Santals as children of nature in the light of Santal folktales describes the Santhals as “the children of nature” (131) and his research expounds the fact in detail shedding light upon Santhali folktales. He further describes that the Santhals leads a very simple life and their necessities are fulfilled easily by the natural objects. In their folktales they are describes as simple and happy people. The idea is further invigorated as Saren asserts, “Their non chemical approach to life fosters a balanced ecosystem” (474). Koustav Majumder and Dipankar Chatterjee in their essay *The Cultural Dimentions of environment: Ethnoscintific study on Santhal community in eastern India* depicts, “They (the Santhals) are the followers of the Sarna religion, which is the worship of nature-based Gods; therefore their culture is highly associated with nature/environment” (5). Their perception of nature is very much different from the modern mainstream people as they see environment as a system consisting the combination of living beings or alive (jiwit) and non-living objects or (Goyet). Majumder and Chatterjee again inform, “The natural elements include plants, sky, fire, water and plant resources etc” (7). Thus, it is intelligible to us that nature plays a crucial role in Santhali culture and their nature-centric life leads to the conservation of the mother nature.

Several cultural and religious festivals, such as Sorhae, Sharul, Sarna, Makar and Durgapuja, are nature centric and greatly connected to nature. Majumder and Chatterjee again write, “Santhals considered the environment as a source of food, medicine (traditional medicine) and shelter; therefore government enacting external laws they adopted various customary resource conservation practices at the community level” (9). They think that as they highly use forest resources it is their primary duty to protect it and take care of it. In Santhali point of view the natural world is perceived as the supreme. Hence forest resources and water resources are considered as an integral part of their lives. In this regard Saren inserts several names of Santhali activists such as Chami Murmu (The lady Tarzan of Jharkhand), Jomuna Tudu, Puspo Murmu, Naren Hansda and Boro Baski who are struggling and trying their best to protect the environment from the human-destructive forces. Chami Murmu has planted and protected forests and wildlife in the local 500 villages of Saraikela Kharsawan district. She has been awarded ‘Padmashree Award’ for that. (473)

The Santhals stand as “nature-preserving souls” amidst the overwhelming tide of human-induced ecological destruction. Their worldview is not a relic of the past but a vital lesson for the present and future. By learning from Santhal ecological ethics, modern society can cultivate a sustainable relationship with the planet. Without embracing such indigenous wisdom, humanity risks accelerating

toward environmental catastrophe. The Santhals fight for their survival and also for biodiversity and the ecosystem. Saren again inserts, “They play a significant role in protecting the forest land and water against illegal loggers, companies and miners” (474). They have fall victim to the capitalist mode of production where exploitation of natural resources has become a common phenomenon. Their lives have been threatened as they are mostly dependent on forest resources. Amidst all these destructive forces the Santhals are playing a remarkable role in preserving the ecosystem. The survival of the earth depends not on destructive progress but on communities like the Santhals, who remind us that nature is not an object to be consumed but a life force to be revered.

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Language, Cultural Capital, and Competitive Examinations: Indigenous Aspirants and the Linguistic Politics of State Bureaucratic Recruitment in India

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Abstract— *Competitive examinations are frequently presented as meritocratic and linguistically neutral. However, sociolinguistic scholarship demonstrates that such systems are embedded within hierarchies of language and cultural capital. This study investigates how linguistic transition and symbolic power shape the experiences of Indigenous (Scheduled Tribe) aspirants preparing for India's Civil Services Examination. Drawing on Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital and postcolonial language scholarship, the article analyzes qualitative data collected from 42 aspirants enrolled in a state-supported residential coaching institution in southern India. Findings reveal that linguistic disadvantage operates as structural misalignment between aspirants' embodied linguistic habitus and the dominant academic register privileged in elite examinations. The study argues that competitive recruitment functions as a site of linguistic gatekeeping that reproduces social stratification, even within affirmative action frameworks. By situating bureaucratic examinations within language and identity scholarship, the article contributes to understanding how institutional language norms regulate access to state power in multilingual societies.*



Keywords— *cultural capital, linguistic hierarchy, Indigenous education, symbolic power, competitive examinations, postcolonial multilingualism*

I. INTRODUCTION

Meritocratic examinations are widely perceived as neutral mechanisms for allocating opportunity. Yet sociolinguistic and critical educational research demonstrates that institutions reward not only knowledge but mastery of dominant linguistic forms (Bourdieu, 1991; Heller, 2007). In multilingual postcolonial societies, language functions as both medium and mechanism of stratification. Contemporary debates on multilingual education—particularly on multilingual access frameworks that challenge equity gaps created by dominant language norms—highlight how educational contexts reproduce linguistic exclusion rather than neutral assessment (Cioè-Peña, Linares, & Kangas, 2025).

India's Civil Services Examination represents one of the most competitive gateways to bureaucratic authority. While constitutional reservation policies mandate

representation for historically marginalized communities, performance disparities persist. Existing scholarship has examined caste and class inequalities in higher education (Deshpande, 2013; Tilak, 2018), but limited attention has been paid to how linguistic hierarchy mediates access to elite state recruitment among Indigenous communities. Parallel research on multilingual education policies shows linguistic capital gaps that disadvantage non-dominant language speakers in formal assessment contexts.

This study examines how language transition and cultural capital shape the trajectories of Indigenous aspirants preparing for the Civil Services Examination. By positioning competitive recruitment within language and identity scholarship, the article reframes examinations as sites of symbolic power and linguistic regulation.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Cultural Capital and Symbolic Power

Bourdieu (1986, 1991) conceptualizes cultural capital as embodied dispositions, linguistic competence, and familiarity with institutional norms that enable individuals to succeed within dominant structures. Educational systems legitimize particular linguistic registers as markers of intelligence and authority. Examinations therefore assess not merely knowledge, but conformity to dominant discourse practices. Existing work extending these ideas shows how multilingual practices and learner identities are shaped by power relations in education settings beyond the classroom, influencing who thrives within institutional language demands (Decolonizing English academic writing education, 2024).

In competitive bureaucratic examinations, aspirants must produce essays, analytical responses, and interviews aligned with institutionalized academic language. Those whose schooling has provided sustained exposure to elite registers possess advantages in symbolic fluency.

2.2 Linguistic Hierarchy in Postcolonial Contexts

English occupies a privileged position within Indian administrative and academic systems (Annamalai, 2004; Ramanathan, 2005). While multilingual policy exists, the symbolic capital of English remains dominant. Phillipson's linguistic imperialism thesis explains how language hierarchies reflect broader socio-political domination. Contemporary critical research on English academic writing highlights how dominant English norms marginalize multilingual learners and reinforce inequities (Decolonizing English academic writing education, 2024).

For Indigenous communities educated primarily in regional or tribal language contexts, transition into English-dominated bureaucratic discourse entails epistemic negotiation and identity restructuring.

2.3 Language, Identity, and Institutional Gatekeeping

Language is central to identity construction (Norton, 2013). When institutional success depends upon mastery of dominant registers, aspirants must negotiate linguistic assimilation without necessarily relinquishing cultural identity. Examinations thus function as linguistic gatekeeping systems that regulate entry into elite state structures. Parallel work on expansive language access frameworks emphasizes how language education policies can inadvertently perpetuate marginalization when they fail to recognize the complex intersectionality of language, identity, and opportunity (Cioè-Peña, Linares, & Kangas, 2025).

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative case-study design integrating survey instruments and semi-structured interviews. The research site was a state-supported residential coaching institution serving Indigenous aspirants in southern India.

3.2 Participants

Participants included 42 Indigenous aspirants (22 male, 20 female) who had attempted at least one cycle of the Civil Services Examination. All participants self-identified as belonging to constitutionally recognized Indigenous communities.

3.3 Data Collection

Data included:

- Structured questionnaire on schooling medium, linguistic background, and self-assessed proficiency
- Semi-structured interviews (n = 18)
- Academic performance reflections during preparatory mock examinations

3.4 Analytical Approach

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding focused on patterns related to linguistic transition, academic discourse familiarity, symbolic confidence, and identity negotiation.

3.5 Reflexivity

The researcher occupies an administrative and academic leadership position within the institutional setting. To minimize interpretive bias, interview transcripts were coded inductively, and interpretations were cross-checked against participant validation feedback. Reflexive memos were maintained to distinguish institutional assumptions from participant narratives.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

All participants provided informed consent. Identifying details were anonymized. Participation did not influence academic evaluation or institutional standing.

IV. FINDINGS

4.1 Linguistic Transition as Structural Disadvantage

Seventy-one percent of participants completed schooling in regional-language government schools. Eighty percent reported initial difficulty producing structured analytical essays in English. Respondents described cognitive translation processes that slowed writing speed and

reduced expressive confidence. This difficulty was not conceptual misunderstanding but discursive alignment.

4.2 Embodied Cultural Capital and Academic Register

Participants frequently noted unfamiliarity with:

- Academic referencing conventions
- Editorial-style argumentative writing
- Policy-analytic Framing.

These practices constitute institutionalized cultural capital. Aspirants from elite urban backgrounds had prior exposure to such discursive norms.

4.3 Symbolic Insecurity and Identity Negotiation

Interview narratives revealed linguistic self-monitoring during mock interviews. Aspirants expressed concern that accent or hesitation might be perceived as lack of competence. Language thus mediated perceptions of legitimacy.

4.4 Digital Mediation of Linguistic Access

Late access to online discourse communities delayed exposure to competitive exam vocabulary and analytical framing practices.

V. DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that competitive examinations operate as sites of linguistic regulation. While reservation policies address structural exclusion at the point of selection, preparatory ecosystems reproduce symbolic hierarchies aligned with dominant linguistic capital. The misalignment between aspirants' embodied linguistic habitus and examination discourse reflects structural inequality rather than individual deficiency. Language thus becomes a mechanism of stratified access to state authority.

VI. CONTRIBUTION TO LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY SCHOLARSHIP

This study contributes by:

1. Extending cultural capital theory into competitive state recruitment
2. Framing bureaucratic examinations as linguistic institutions
3. Situating Indigenous aspirant experiences within global debates on language and power and multilingual education equity

VII. CONCLUSION

In multilingual postcolonial societies, access to elite state institutions is mediated through linguistic hierarchy. Competitive examinations reward alignment with dominant academic registers, thereby functioning as mechanisms of symbolic gatekeeping. Addressing inequality therefore requires not only representational quotas but structured linguistic support that recognizes language as a site of power.

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Digital Archives and Indigenous Silence: Reimagining the Jarawa through Pankaj Sekhsaria's *The Last Wave*

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Abstract— This paper explores the intersection of indigenous representation, ecological ethics, and digital preservation through a close reading of Pankaj Sekhsaria's *The Last Wave: An Island Novel* (2014). Set in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the novel subtly engages with the lives of the Jarawa tribe, an indigenous community historically marginalized in state archives and media narratives. Rather than fictionalizing the Jarawa's voice, Sekhsaria foregrounds their presence through silence, gesture, and ecological attunement, modeling a form of ethical narrative restraint. This literary silence mirrors a broader archival erasure, where indigenous voices are excluded or distorted by colonial and postcolonial documentation systems. Drawing on theories from Digital Humanities, postcolonial thought, and critical archival studies, the paper argues that Digital Humanities can offer transformative tools to counteract these silences, if they are applied with decolonial ethics. It proposes the idea of a decolonial digital archive that centers indigenous agency, respects orality and refusal, and resists extractive knowledge practices. The paper suggests that annotated editions of *The Last Wave*, combined with GIS-based cultural mapping and audio/visual platforms, could serve as ethical gateways to indigenous knowledge, without appropriating or essentializing it.



Keywords— Digital Humanities, Indigenous Knowledge, Decolonial Archives, Jarawa Tribe, Ecocriticism

INTRODUCTION

Pankaj Sekhsaria's *The Last Wave: An Island Novel* (2014) stands as a distinctive literary work that bridges journalism, activism, and fiction to confront pressing questions of ecological vulnerability and indigenous survival in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Set against the backdrop of the lush, forested landscapes of South and Middle Andaman, the novel offers a compelling narrative that interweaves personal transformation with collective histories of loss, resistance, and ecological imbalance. Through the eyes of Harish, a disillusioned mainlander who seeks refuge on the islands following a personal crisis, readers are gradually introduced to the delicate socio-ecological dynamics that define the region. More than a story of individual redemption, this novel serves as a narrative intervention, inviting readers to confront the environmental consequences of unchecked

development and the ethical dilemmas surrounding indigenous autonomy.

At the heart of this narrative lies the presence of the Jarawa tribe, one of the last surviving indigenous communities in India, which has maintained a largely non-assimilated existence. The Jarawa inhabit the dense tropical forests of the Andaman Islands and have historically resisted sustained contact with outsiders. However, in recent decades, their relative isolation has come under increasing threat from multiple forces, most notably the expansion of the Andaman Trunk Road (ATR), escalating tourism, illegal logging, and state-driven development agendas that prioritize infrastructure over ecological integrity. As Sekhsaria himself has documented extensively in his journalistic and academic writings, the Jarawa's forest homeland has become a contested site where the rhetoric of modernization collides with the lived realities of indigenous knowledge and ecological stewardship.

The novel draws attention to this conflict not through sensationalism but through subtle observation and ethical storytelling. The Jarawa are not given direct speech in the novel, a narrative decision that mirrors their real-world silence in official records and media portrayals. Yet, their presence is powerfully felt, as moral anchors, as ecological stewards, and as silent witnesses to the damage wrought by modernity. This novel does not romanticize indigenous life, nor does it claim to speak on behalf of the Jarawa. Instead, it critiques the structural forces, bureaucratic, economic, and ideological, that seek to control and redefine their existence. The novel thus becomes an important literary voice in the broader discourse of postcolonial ecocriticism, illustrating how fiction can reveal the layered complexities of indigenous representation, environmental degradation, and the politics of archiving endangered cultures.

In this context, the question of how we record, preserve, and represent communities like the Jarawa becomes urgent. Traditional state and colonial archives have long framed such tribes as “vanishing,” “primitive,” or “mute,” denying them agency in shaping their narratives. Sekhsaria's novel resists these tropes by creating space for ethical reflection and alternative storytelling. This opens a productive space for Digital Humanities, where digital archives, if designed with decolonial sensitivity, can offer new ways of preserving indigenous knowledge and challenging the silences embedded in official histories.

The present paper examines how Digital Humanities, particularly through the tools and ethics of digital archiving, can offer a pathway to address such silences. By taking *The Last Wave* as a literary case study, the paper explores how DH methodologies can be employed not only to preserve endangered indigenous knowledge systems, like those of the Jarawa, but also to critique and counteract the historical distortions embedded in colonial, state, and media narratives. The central argument is that a decolonial digital archive, built with attention to consent, participation, and indigenous epistemologies, can serve as a corrective to centuries of misrepresentation and erasure. Through this interdisciplinary approach, the paper seeks to reimagine the role of digital technologies not as neutral tools, but as transformative platforms capable of unsettling dominant histories and amplifying marginalized voices with ethical responsibility.

This paper is grounded in an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that brings together concepts from Digital Humanities (DH), postcolonial theory, oral tradition studies, and critical archival studies. These perspectives offer tools to interrogate both the literary representation of the Jarawa in this novel and the broader structural silences that have defined indigenous presence in archival and media

discourses. The Digital Humanities, broadly defined, refer to the application of computational methods to the study of humanities subjects, but more critically, DH also encompasses the ethics and politics of knowledge production and dissemination in digital spaces. As Roopika Risam argues in *New Digital Worlds: Postcolonial Digital Humanities in Theory, Praxis, and Pedagogy* (2018), DH must be examined not merely as a technological project, but as a site of “epistemological and infrastructural intervention” (Risam 4). In the context of this paper, DH is approached through the lens of digital archiving, which involves not only the digitization of textual and cultural materials but also decisions about metadata, access, community participation, and representational ethics.

This project also draws from postcolonial theory and subaltern studies, particularly the work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, whose seminal essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” examines how the voices of marginalized and colonized subjects are often erased or distorted when filtered through dominant discourses. Spivak asserts that “representation” in both the political and epistemic sense often fails the subaltern, who remains unheard even when present within texts or institutions (Spivak 104). This concern is highly relevant in the case of the Jarawa, who are present throughout this novel as central figures in the moral and ecological conflict, yet remain voiceless in direct dialogue. The novel, in its ethical restraint, mirrors a larger structural problem: even well-meaning representations can perpetuate silence if they do not provide avenues for self-representation or recognize the forms in which indigenous expression occurs.

Critical archival studies provide a crucial ethical framework for understanding how archives, digital or otherwise, are never neutral repositories of truth but are instead shaped by power, inclusion, exclusion, and narrative control. Michelle Caswell, a leading voice in this field, argues in *The Right to Be Forgotten in Archives* (2018) that traditional archival systems have historically served the interests of dominant institutions and have often excluded marginalized communities from shaping how their histories are preserved and accessed. In response, Caswell advocates for community-centered, participatory archives that enable historically silenced groups to regain narrative authority over their pasts. Such a model is vital when considering how to preserve Jarawa cultural memory in digital form: rather than treating their knowledge as artifacts to be collected, a decolonial digital archive would seek to collaborate with communities, respect protocols of consent and privacy, and prioritize indigenous modes of categorization, storytelling, and epistemic sovereignty.

Sekhsaria makes a deliberate and ethically charged narrative decision, the Jarawa tribe, though central to the

novel's moral and ecological compass, is never given direct speech. This narrative restraint is not a failure of representation, but rather a conscious rejection of ventriloquism, an act that refuses to impose an external voice onto a community that has long been spoken for by colonial ethnographers, state agencies, and media outlets. Instead of attempting to fictionalize or approximate the speech of the Jarawa, Sekhsaria chooses to let their presence speak through action, gesture, and silence. This approach mirrors the author's real-life engagement with indigenous rights and environmental activism, where respectful distance often takes precedence over narrative control. In doing so, the novel avoids the trap of appropriating indigenous subjectivity for narrative authenticity and instead models a form of ethical literary witnessing.

The Jarawa emerge in the novel not as passive figures or exoticized "others," but as embodied repositories of ecological wisdom. Their knowledge of the forest, conveyed through actions rather than words, stands in stark contrast to the external gaze of journalists, tourists, and bureaucrats who seek to define or regulate them. As Seema, one of the novel's central characters, observes, "They live in a way that we've forgotten, close to the land, listening to it, moving with it" (Sekhsaria 123). Their silence, then, is not emptiness but presence; it is a mode of resistance and self-preservation in a world that constantly seeks to violate their autonomy. This is most powerfully illustrated in the aftermath of the tsunami. While government officials and mainland settlers are caught off guard by the disaster, the Jarawa read the signs in nature and retreat inland to safety. Harish, the protagonist, reflects on this moment with reverence, "They knew. Without forecasts or satellite images, they knew. The forest had told them, and they listened" (Sekhsaria 205). Here, the novel privileges observational and oral epistemologies that remain outside the purview of technocratic knowledge systems, suggesting that wisdom is not always textual, and survival is not always documented.

This literary portrayal echoes the systemic silence of the Jarawa in official records and public discourse. Historically, indigenous communities like the Jarawa have been subject to what Gayatri Spivak identifies as the structural silencing of the subaltern, where presence in the archive does not equate to agency or voice. This novel does not attempt to resolve this silence, but rather renders it visible, inviting readers to reflect on the violence of representation itself. The narrative form thus becomes a mirror to archival practices, where absence is not merely a gap but a product of exclusionary systems of knowledge production. While literature has more creative freedom than state archives, Sekhsaria's refusal to fictionalize Jarawa speech gestures toward a shared ethical problem, how do we

document those who resist documentation? And more importantly, how can we avoid turning that resistance into another form of narrative appropriation? In this way, this novel operates on two registers. It is, first, a work of ecological fiction that foregrounds indigenous resilience and environmental ethics. But it is also a meta-commentary on the politics of representation, dramatizing the very difficulty of writing about communities that exist outside dominant systems of language, legality, and technology. The silence of the Jarawa in the novel thus becomes a site of ethical engagement rather than narrative failure, prompting readers and scholars to rethink the protocols of voice, visibility, and authority. As such, the novel opens critical space for a Digital Humanities intervention that seeks not to "give voice" to the Jarawa, but to create platforms where their epistemologies can be preserved and honored without translation or appropriation.

Postcolonial state archives in India, while ostensibly committed to tribal welfare, have often inherited and reproduced these colonial epistemologies. Policies governing the Jarawa, especially those surrounding the controversial Andaman Trunk Road (ATR), reflect a paternalistic logic in which the state claims to know what is best for the indigenous population. The language of such documents is frequently couched in developmentalist rhetoric that masks underlying coercive intentions: assimilation, surveillance, and spatial control. The absence of Jarawa voices in these records is conspicuous; even where the tribe is the subject of policy decisions, their perspectives, desires, or knowledge systems are nowhere acknowledged. This structural silencing mirrors the concerns raised by critical archival theorists like Michelle Caswell, who argue that traditional archives often reinforce existing power hierarchies by privileging institutional voices and marginalizing or erasing community-based knowledge.

Pankaj Sekhsaria has critiqued these dynamics extensively in his journalism and academic work. In essays published in *Economic and Political Weekly* and *The Hindu*, as well as in his nonfiction collection *Islands in Flux: The Andaman and Nicobar Story*, he details how both media and official institutions have contributed to the construction of the Jarawa as a spectacle, a population to be observed, regulated, and ultimately folded into the national mainstream. For example, in an article in *The Hindu* newspaper titled "Jarawa in the Cultural Ghetto," Sekhsaria highlights how government interventions often treat the tribe as "biological entities to be protected and monitored" rather than as communities with political agency and cultural subjectivity (Sekhsaria 6). He further criticizes the media's tendency to sensationalize contact with the Jarawa, reducing complex cultural interactions to headlines about

“naked tribes” or “stone-age people,” thus reinforcing the same tropes that colonial ethnographers employed over a century ago. Even academic research, often well-meaning, is not immune to these pitfalls. Sekhsaria warns against the “over-archiving” of indigenous lives through frameworks that prioritize data collection over dialogue and preservation over participation. The proliferation of reports, census records, and ecological studies rarely results in material benefits or political empowerment for the Jarawa themselves. Instead, they become archived subjects, defined by external observers, constrained by categories they had no role in shaping, and preserved in formats that exclude their epistemologies.

What emerges from this analysis is a deeply entrenched asymmetry in the politics of documentation. The Jarawa are among the most studied yet least heard communities in India, a paradox that speaks to the ethical crisis at the heart of indigenous archiving. The absence of indigenous agency in traditional archives is not a neutral omission but a constitutive feature of systems designed to manage and contain rather than understand or collaborate. This makes the case for a radical rethinking of archival practice, one that is participatory, decolonial, and attuned to orality and relationality. In this light, this novel, with its careful refusal to over-narrate or appropriate Jarawa voice, serves as a useful model for what ethical engagement might look like, not just in fiction, but in the broader sphere of digital preservation and cultural memory.

In response to the epistemic erasure and representational imbalance surrounding indigenous communities like the Jarawa, this section outlines a framework for building a decolonial digital archive grounded in the principles of ethical Digital Humanities (DH). Unlike conventional archives that operate from top-down, institution-driven perspectives, a decolonial DH archive would prioritize collaboration, consent, and indigenous agency, reimagining the very foundations of how knowledge is preserved and circulated. At its core, such an archive must begin by recognizing that the knowledge systems of the Jarawa are not easily reducible to text or static representation. Their epistemologies are oral, embodied, and relational, rooted in their dynamic interactions with the forest, the sea, and each other. This necessitates a rethinking of the archive not as a repository, but as a living, co-created space that respects these forms of knowing.

A decolonial digital archive centered on the Jarawa must begin with the principle of community consent and participation. Unlike traditional, extractive models of knowledge collection, such an archive would be co-created with the Jarawa, if and only if they choose to engage. In cases where direct collaboration is not feasible, the archive

must respect the community's right to refuse inclusion, allowing absence itself to signal resistance to representation. It should also be designed to honor oral, embodied, and ecological forms of knowledge, utilizing formats such as audio recordings, video storytelling, and forest-based narratives in indigenous languages. These approaches challenge Western biases that prioritize text, offering instead platforms that preserve indigenous epistemologies on their terms.

Digital tools such as GIS-based cultural mapping could further support this effort by representing the Andaman Islands as layered with indigenous histories, rather than as tourist sites or spaces of state control. Alongside this, the archive might include annotated editions of literary works, such as *The Last Wave* or *The Hungry Tide*, enriched with indigenous perspectives and critical commentary. To avoid replicating colonial systems of classification, the project would need to develop community-specific metadata vocabularies, possibly in local languages, and resist rigid taxonomies like “folklore” or “tribal art.” As Roopika Risam and Michelle Caswell have argued, archival justice begins with structural redesign. Modeled on the ethical restraint Sekhsaria practices in his novel, such a digital archive would not claim to speak for indigenous communities, but instead build technologies of listening, refusal, and relational care, offering a more just and respectful approach to digital preservation.

While the vision of a decolonial digital archive is powerful, its realization presents serious ethical challenges, especially when applied to communities like the Jarawa, who have historically resisted outside contact. The most pressing dilemma is how to ensure non-extractive digitization without sustained, voluntary engagement. Documenting their knowledge without their consent, however well-intended, risks repeating colonial patterns of appropriation and undermining the community's autonomy. As Michelle Caswell emphasizes, the right to refuse inclusion must be central to any ethical archival practice. For a group like the Jarawa, silence and absence are not voids to be filled, but expressions of self-determination that a responsible digital project must respect. Equally urgent is the threat of digital colonialism, the reproduction of unequal power dynamics through technology. Archives controlled by external institutions may unintentionally serve academic or institutional interests while excluding indigenous voices. To counter this, a decolonial archive must be co-designed with community stakeholders, incorporate dynamic consent mechanisms, and be transparent about its limitations. If direct collaboration is not possible, the archive must acknowledge what it cannot ethically include. In this way, the project becomes not a comprehensive database, but a

space of ethical negotiation and humility, reflecting the same restraint and reverence that Sekhsaria exemplifies in *The Last Wave*.

Building on these challenges, literature, particularly a novel like *The Last Wave*, offers an alternative framework for ethical engagement with indigenous presence in the digital age. While empirical and archival records often strive for completeness or authority, fiction can model forms of respectful incompleteness, emphasizing the value of listening, withholding, and acknowledging epistemic boundaries. Sekhsaria's refusal to speak on behalf of the Jarawa is not a narrative omission but a deliberate ethical stance, one that mirrors the archival principle of non-intrusion and aligns with decolonial calls to center absence as resistance. For Digital Humanities practitioners, this approach becomes instructive: rather than viewing fiction as merely supplementary to ethnographic data, this novel illustrates how storytelling can challenge dominant paradigms of representation, prompting us to rethink what, and who, digital archives are for. In this way, literature does not merely reflect ethical concerns; it actively shapes the methodological imagination of decolonial digital work.

One of the novel's most significant contributions lies in its use of imaginative restitution. Rather than claiming to recover lost indigenous voices, *The Last Wave* reconstructs the ecological and political context in which those voices have been suppressed or silenced. Through its depiction of state intrusion, media sensationalism, and the ethical struggles of well-meaning outsiders, the novel renders visible the forces that marginalize indigenous subjectivity without attempting to speak in its place. This kind of imaginative work is critical in DH, where the urge to preserve and display must be tempered by an awareness of what cannot, and perhaps should not be digitally rendered. Literature, in this sense, becomes a space of rehearsal and reflection, allowing researchers to explore how stories might be told ethically, even in the absence of direct testimony.

Building on this, one concrete proposal is to incorporate this novel itself into the infrastructure of digital archives as a gateway text, a bridge between fiction, journalism, and indigenous testimony. Annotated digital editions of the novel, for instance, could be developed that contextualize its representations with scholarly commentary, regional history, environmental data, and excerpts from indigenous-rights literature. Such a resource would not only enrich literary analysis but also foster cross-disciplinary dialogue, connecting humanities scholars, environmentalists, and DH practitioners in shared ethical reflection. The annotations could highlight the novel's cautionary depictions of media, its critique of state development policies, and its nuanced portrayals of non-

verbal indigenous knowledge systems. They could also invite counter-commentary or supplemental material from local communities, where appropriate, creating a layered, dialogic archive rather than a static, authoritative one. By foregrounding the representational ethics modeled in *The Last Wave*, such a digital edition would avoid the temptation to instrumentalize the text or reduce it to ethnographic data. Instead, it would preserve the ambivalence and restraint that are central to the novel's ethical power. In doing so, it would model a broader DH methodology, one that understands literature not as a source of information, but as a practice of critical and imaginative engagement, capable of guiding how we build, use, and critique digital archives in the age of postcolonial reckoning.

CONCLUSION

Pankaj Sekhsaria's *The Last Wave* presents a compelling reflection on the ethical boundaries and potentialities of representing indigenous communities, particularly the Jarawa, whose histories have long been shaped by exclusion from official archives, media narratives, and dominant forms of knowledge. Through its narrative restraint and refusal to appropriate Jarawa voices, the novel models an alternative form of engagement, one that centers silence, presence, and ecological wisdom without imposing external frameworks. In doing so, it offers valuable insights for Digital Humanities, urging practitioners to rethink archival practices that too often reproduce colonial patterns of representation and control. Digital Humanities, when grounded in decolonial ethics, can become powerful tools for resisting archival silence. But this requires more than digitization, it demands community participation, recognition of orality and non-textual knowledge, and a willingness to foreground absence as an intentional and ethical act. In contexts like the Jarawa, where direct collaboration may not be possible, the most ethical archive may be one that resists classification, resists completion, and instead reflects careful restraint and structural humility. The way forward lies in designing community-driven, participatory archives that value relational knowledge over universal systems, and that make space for ambiguity, refusal, and cultural specificity. Digital tools must be reshaped to serve not only access and preservation but also justice and accountability. The future of archiving must be defined not by how much can be collected, but by how deeply we are willing to listen, unlearn, and honor what cannot be contained. In this respect, *The Last Wave* is more than literature, it is a moral compass for those seeking to ethically navigate the intersection of storytelling, technology, and indigenous sovereignty.

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Arguments for Reinstalling Translation in the Foreign Language Teaching Classroom: Insights from CPGE English Teachers in Morocco

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Abstract— *The pedagogical validity of translation in EFL teaching has been contested since the emergence of the Direct Method, causing its marginalisation in mainstream language education. This article investigates some of the main arguments that led to the exclusion of translation in EFL pedagogies. Typically, it questions the assumption that translation is exclusively useful in the training of professional translators. It also examines the extent to which translation contributes to the development of the language learners' linguistic and metalinguistic competencies, as well as its ability to facilitate cross-cultural understanding. To address those issues, this study adopts a quantitative research design and draws on data collected through a questionnaire administered to Moroccan CPGE teachers of English, eliciting their perceptions and reported practices regarding the use of translation in EFL teaching. The statistical analysis of the responses suggests that translation is perceived as helpful in the development of the learners' linguistic, metalinguistic, and communicative competencies. The findings indicate that, rather than superseded, translation can be employed as a legitimate instructional practice within language education, thereby challenging its exclusion from language teaching methodologies.*



Keywords— *Cross-cultural understanding, Language pedagogy, Linguistic competence, Metalinguistic awareness, Moroccan CPGE, Translation in EFL.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The debate surrounding the place of translation in language instruction has resurfaced many times since the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) was pushed aside in favor of more fashionable pedagogies. With the rise of monolingual approaches, translation continued to exist, but often quietly and at the margins. In Morocco, for example, opposition to translation in ELT has generally relied on ready-made arguments claiming that it contributes neither to learning English nor to achieving communicative goals. These positions go back to the monolingual foundations of the Direct Method.

Today, however, language teaching operates in a very different landscape. The emphasis on diversity,

intercultural awareness, and multilingual competence has encouraged educational systems to revisit earlier assumptions. Many of the newer policies acknowledge learners' linguistic repertoires rather than ignore them, and translation naturally finds a place within these perspectives. It plays a central role in approaches that aim both to teach a foreign language and to value the languages learners bring with them.

Drawing on insights from Moroccan CPGE English teachers, this article reopens the discussion around translation. Its purpose is to show that translation is not a peripheral or outdated exercise, but a legitimate skill that supports linguistic and metalinguistic development while also facilitating communication across linguistic and

cultural boundaries. For this reason, the article revisits some of the key claims that contributed to the marginalization of translation in mainstream language education, and then offers pedagogically grounded counterarguments supporting its integration as an instructional practice in the foreign-language classroom.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Historically, translation has been pushed to the margins of foreign language teaching and often treated with suspicion (Cook, 2010). Much of this rejection stems from the monolingual ideals that shaped modern language pedagogy and from the long-standing criticism directed at the Grammar Translation Method. As a result, arguments against translation have rested on several recurring claims: (1) that a bilingual approach cannot support vocabulary development; (2) that translation does not contribute to grammatical understanding or awareness of sentence structure; (3) that it offers little value for cross-cultural communication; and (4) that it belongs exclusively to the training of professional translators and interpreters, not to mainstream language classrooms (Atkinson, 1987; Duff, 1998; Malmkjær, 1998; Zojer, 2009).

In the sections that follow, I revisit these assumptions and offer counterarguments supported by survey data collected from Moroccan CPGE English teachers. The aim is to show that the exclusion of translation from classroom practice has relied more on inherited ideological positions than on pedagogical reasoning, and that translation can, in fact, function as a meaningful and purposeful activity in the foreign-language classroom when used with clear instructional intent.

1. Translation helps with vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure.

Much of what happens in contemporary English classrooms is still shaped by the monolingual principles that emerged with the Direct Method and the “mother-tongue phobia” it promoted (Smentek, 2017, p. 130). Krashen’s Monitor Hypothesis (Krashen, 1985), drawing on Chomsky’s account of language acquisition, holds that second-language learners progress through a natural route similar to that of first-language acquisition. From this perspective, unconscious learning through abundant and comprehensible input is presented as the primary—if not the only—path to successful foreign-language learning.

However, the neurological evidence suggests a more complex picture. Dong et al. (2005) showed that L2 vocabulary is stored in the same cortical region as L1 vocabulary, indicating that L1 meanings transfer to L2

forms. This implies that some degree of lexical mapping between L1 and L2 is likely to happen regardless of the learner’s intentions or the teacher’s methodological beliefs. In other words, new L2 items activate pre-existing L1 equivalents. If this is the case, then the idea of “pure” immersion becomes difficult to sustain, and translation activities can be seen not as obstacles, but as pedagogically coherent practices within foreign-language instruction.

Translation also offers clear advantages for understanding grammatical contrasts, especially with regard to tense systems and subject-verb agreement (Fisiak et al., 1978). Wysocka (1984, p. 12) reminds us that the first language “always exists as the learner’s reference system,” and can therefore be mobilized to make sense of unfamiliar grammatical constructions in the target language. Similarly, Wenzel (1994, p. 51) advocates the use of translation as a form of “conscious learning”: for beginners, it addresses foundational syntactic challenges; for more advanced learners, it highlights subtle syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic differences. Butzkamm (2003, p. 31) further argues that the mother tongue does not restrict learners—it “opens the door... to all grammars,” because it activates the universal grammatical potential shared by all humans.

A further benefit linked to translation is its role in facilitating positive transfer from L1 to L2. Gabryś-Barker (2007, p. 41) notes that explicit instruction based on learners’ L1 promotes grammatical awareness and reduces negative transfer. Likewise, Smentek (2017, p. 157) maintains that translation can be used at different stages of instruction to elicit vocabulary, clarify grammatical forms, and correct errors. The literature, taken together, provides extensive evidence that translation is a legitimate and effective approach to teaching grammar.

Critiques of Krashen’s monolingual model have emphasized the importance of conscious noticing (Schmidt, 1990; Widdowson, 2002) and attention to form (Long, 1991). These principles have long guided teachers’ incidental comments on structure and form, even in meaning-oriented classrooms. Translation creates natural opportunities for such focus on form. Yet, as Cook (2010) observes, the scientific developments that shaped modern language teaching have rarely been applied to translation, leaving a gap between theory and practice.

Butzkamm and Caldwell (2009, p. 125) address this gap by outlining the substitution technique, where teachers provide sentences in the learners’ first language and students produce target-language equivalents. These sentences reflect specific structures that the teacher intends to practice, and the repetition involved helps learners internalize abstract patterns and develop syntactic fluency.

This illustrates how translation can function systematically within a language course and contribute to the development of grammatical accuracy and sentence structure.

2. Translation is not limited to professionals: a fifth skill for cross-cultural communication

Education equips learners with skills for real tasks. Taken narrowly, this could suggest that translation belongs only to aspiring professional translators and interpreters. Yet in a world that is increasingly multilingual and multicultural, translation is a routine practice in schools, workplaces, and other public settings. It appears both as straightforward meaning transfer between languages and as a form of social mediation between monolingual interlocutors from different communities (Europarat, 2020). In this sense, individual and societal needs are complementary: society requires diverse linguistic competences—including translation—while individuals depend on social structures that enable personal, academic, and professional development (Cook, 2010). Language education sits at this interface.

That translation engages the four traditional skills is evident: meaningful translation tasks require substantial reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Colina, 2000, p. 8), as well as, where relevant, signing. Beyond this integration, translation can be framed as a fifth skill, reflecting the growing demand for communication across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Although one might associate this skill exclusively with professional translators and interpreters, contemporary multilingual life—and the notion of innate bilingualism discussed by Butzkamm and Caldwell (2009)—has intensified the need for immediate, situated mediation that often precedes or replaces third-party services. From a policy perspective, the Council of Europe's inclusion of mediation in the CEFR (Europarat, 2020) signals a shift toward educating not only multilingual individuals but also social agents capable of preventing communication breakdowns and sustaining intercultural dialogue. In this light, translation merits recognition as a fifth skill within foreign-language syllabuses and curricula.

Cross-cultural understanding emerges from successful intercultural communication—exchanges that traverse linguistic forms and the cultural meanings attached to them. Miscommunication often stems from treating linguistic units as if they were culturally neutral. Translation, by contrast, foregrounds the connotative and pragmatic dimensions of language. Ehlich's (1984, p. 12) notion of a "dilated speech situation" captures this dynamic: speakers recognize that their text will be translated and adjust it for smoother transfer across

linguistic and cultural boundaries. Likewise, House (2016) argues that translation requires the construction and interrogation of functional equivalence. As a classroom practice, translation therefore creates purposeful opportunities to decode and recode meanings across systems, fostering genuine intercultural communication.

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS & HYPOTHESIS

This study addresses the following questions:

- Q.1. Does translation in ELT foster the learning of vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure?
- Q.2. Does translation in ELT promote cross-cultural communication and understanding?
- Q.3. Can translation be justifiably considered a fifth skill?

We hypothesize that translation can be treated as a fifth skill: it supports linguistic and metalinguistic development and extends cross-cultural communication and understanding.

IV. METHODOLOGY

To address these questions, we conducted a survey of Moroccan CPGE English teachers, a context in which translation forms a required component of both syllabus and assessment. The survey explored: (a) teachers' views on language-teaching methods, and (b) their responses to statements about translation as a classroom activity in English courses. Because of space constraints, this article reports the analysis and discussion of items directly related to translation.

The target population comprised 67 CPGE English teachers. We received 36 responses representing 21 CPGE centers across the country, with geographic coverage from Tangier (north) to Dakhla (south) and from Oujda (east) to Casablanca (west). Participants' experience in English teaching ranged from 5 to more than 20 years; their CPGE-specific experience ranged from 1 to more than 20 years. Respondents taught first- and second-year classes in a range of CPGE tracks, including Mathematics, Physics, Economics, Technological Sciences, Engineering Sciences, and Industrial Sciences. Given their first-hand engagement with translation in teaching and assessment, this group is well positioned to comment on its pedagogical merits and limitations. The data are quantitative and were analyzed statistically using SPSS.

V. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

5.1. Linguistic arguments

5.1.1. Translation expands vocabulary

The data on teachers' views regarding the role of translation in vocabulary acquisition show a clear tendency toward agreement. As presented in the table, 41.7% of respondents agreed and 36.1% strongly agreed, yielding a cumulative agreement of 77.8%. In contrast, only 5.6% expressed disagreement, while 16.7% remained neutral. With a mean of 4.08 and a standard deviation of 0.874, the results indicate that the majority of respondents consider translation to be an effective practice for supporting vocabulary learning.

Table 1. Frequency distribution and descriptive statistics

Response category	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Disagree	2	5.6	5.6	5.6
Indifferent	6	16.7	16.7	22.2
Agree	15	41.7	41.7	63.9
Strongly agree	13	36.1	36.1	100.0
Total	36	100.0	100.0	—

Descriptive statistics

Mean	Median	Standard deviation
4.08	4.18 ^a	0.874

a. Calculated from grouped data

5.1.2. Translation helps with grammar understanding.

The data show unanimous support for the claim that translation assists learners in understanding grammar. Not a single respondent expressed disagreement. Half of the teachers (50%) agreed with the statement, while 36.1% strongly agreed, resulting in a cumulative positive response of 86.1%. Only 13.9% of participants remained neutral. The descriptive statistics reinforce this tendency: the mean score and standard deviation both point to a clear consensus among respondents that translation contributes to learners' grasp of grammatical features in the target language.

Table 2. Frequency distribution and descriptive statistics

Response category	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Indifferent	5	13.9	13.9	13.9
Agree	18	50.0	50.0	63.9
Strongly agree	13	36.1	36.1	100.0
Total	36	100.0	100.0	—

Descriptive statistics

Mean	Median	Standard deviation
4.22	4.26 ^a	0.681

a. Calculated from grouped data

5.1.3. Translation promotes understanding of sentence structure.

The data for this item indicate a generally positive perception of translation as a means of supporting learners' understanding of sentence structure. 44.4% of respondents agreed with the statement, and 19.4% strongly agreed, yielding a cumulative agreement of 63.8%. In contrast, only 5.6% disagreed and another 5.6% strongly disagreed, resulting in a total disagreement rate of 11.1%. A further 25% of participants selected the neutral option. With a mean score of 3.76 and a standard deviation of 1.042, the results suggest that respondents tend to view translation as having a positive, though somewhat less uniform, effect on learners' ability to understand sentence structure in the target language.

Table 3. Frequency distribution and descriptive statistics

Response category	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Strongly disagree	2	5.6	5.6	5.6
Disagree	2	5.6	5.6	11.1
Indifferent	9	25.0	25.0	36.1
Agree	16	44.4	44.4	80.6
Strongly agree	7	19.4	19.4	100.0
Total	36	100.0	100.0	—

Descriptive statistics

Mean	Median	Standard deviation
3.67	3.76 ^a	1.042

a. Calculated from grouped data

5.2. Metalinguistic arguments

5.2.1. Translation is a fifth skill.

The data indicate that 50% of respondents consider translation to be a fifth skill, and a further 22.2% strongly agree with this view. In contrast, 13.9% disagree and 5.6% strongly disagree. Overall, the distribution of responses clearly leans toward acknowledging translation as a legitimate skill alongside the four traditional language skills. The visual representation of the results reinforces this trend, showing a dominant proportion of attitudes supporting the recognition of translation as a fully established skill in the language-learning repertoire.

Table 4. Frequency distribution and descriptive statistics

Response category	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Strongly disagree	2	5.6	5.6	5.6
Disagree	5	13.9	13.9	19.4
Indifferent	3	8.3	8.3	27.8
Agree	18	50.0	50.0	77.8
Strongly agree	8	22.2	22.2	100.0
Total	36	100.0	100.0	—

Descriptive statistics

Mean	Median	Standard deviation
3.69	3.90 ^a	1.142

a. Calculated from grouped data

5.2.2. Translating is for professionals only.

A recurrent claim in the debate on translation is that it is a practice reserved for professionals rather than for language learners. The data collected for this item point strongly in the opposite direction. 47.2% of respondents disagreed with the statement, and an additional 25% expressed strong disagreement, bringing the cumulative disagreement to 72.2%. By contrast, only 11.1% agreed, while 16.7% remained neutral. The mean and standard deviation further support this distribution, suggesting that respondents broadly reject the idea that translation should be confined to professional settings. Instead, they view it as a skill of comparable importance to reading, listening, speaking, and writing within the foreign-language classroom.

Table 5. Frequency distribution and descriptive statistics

Response category	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Strongly disagree	9	25.0	25.0	25.0
Disagree	17	47.2	47.2	72.2
Indifferent	6	16.7	16.7	88.9
Agree	3	8.3	8.3	97.2
Strongly agree	1	2.8	2.8	100.0
Total	36	100.0	100.0	—

Descriptive statistics

Mean	Median	Standard deviation
2.17	2.04 ^a	1.000

a. Calculated from grouped data

5.2.3. Translation fosters cross-cultural understanding.

The relationship between translation and cross-cultural understanding appears to generate mixed reactions among respondents. The largest proportion (30.6%) expressed neutrality, indicating that many teachers are uncertain about the extent to which translation contributes to cross-cultural understanding. Notably, the percentage of agreement (19.4%) is identical to that of disagreement (19.4%), suggesting an even split in perceptions. The descriptive statistics support this interpretation: the mean and median both stand at 3.28, with a relatively high standard deviation of 1.256, reflecting variability in respondents' opinions.

Although these results do not provide strong statistical support for the claim that translation enhances cross-cultural understanding, they equally offer no compelling evidence to dismiss its potential in this area. In other words, the data point to an area of pedagogical practice where teachers remain divided, and where further empirical investigation may be needed.

Table 6. Frequency distribution and descriptive statistics

Response category	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Strongly disagree	3	8.3	8.3	8.3
Disagree	7	19.4	19.4	27.8
Indifferent	11	30.6	30.6	58.3
Agree	7	19.4	19.4	77.8
Strongly agree	8	22.2	22.2	100.0
Total	36	100.0	100.0	—

Descriptive statistics

Mean	Median	Standard deviation
3.28	3.28 ^a	1.256

b. Calculated from grouped data

VI. DISCUSSION

The claim that translation supports vocabulary learning is central to this study, and the descriptive statistics point to a generally favorable view among teachers. This pattern is consistent with Saricoban's argument that translation helps learners determine which lexical item is appropriate in a given context (Saricoban, 2012). It also accords with Prince's experimental findings, which reported superior vocabulary recall for translation-based learning compared with context-only instruction (Prince, 1996).

With respect to grammar, the results provide strong support for the view that translation can aid learners' understanding of rule systems. This resonates with Wysocka's (1984) observation that translation enables learners to map new L2 syntactic rules onto existing L1 schemas through comparative analysis. Our findings likewise align with Murtisari et al. (2020, p. 7), who note that "the process of comparing and evaluating texts in two languages appeared to heighten students' awareness of grammatical structures, something they felt helped improve their accuracy when using English." Taken together, the evidence suggests that translation, as a guided form of conscious bilingual learning, facilitates learners' grasp of subtle grammatical similarities and differences across languages.

Our data also support the claim that translation, as a classroom activity, promotes understanding of sentence structure. Nearly half of the sample (44.4%) viewed

translation favorably in this respect. This tendency is consistent with the argument that translation cultivates learners' metalinguistic awareness and helps them discern salient rules of sentence formation in a more deductive manner. Historically, the positive impact of translation on sentence-level accuracy has endured beyond the rejection of the Grammar Translation Method. As Smentek (2017) argues, translation tasks can foreground conventional syntagmatic relations as well as morphological and lexical combinations—supporting the development of L2 writing and reinforcing knowledge of target-language syntactic structures within a contrastive framework.

Whether translation should be developed as a skill in its own right remains debated in the language-education literature. Attitudes rooted in the Direct Method's monolingual dogma have long cast doubt on translation as a legitimate goal of language teaching. Yet the responses in our study indicate a shift toward recognizing translation as a fifth skill—echoing Newmark's (1991, p. 62) position and Smentek's formulation of translation as "just as important as the four basic L2 skills" (2017, p. 178). Pedagogically, translation can be conceptualized as a composite skill that strategically integrates receptive and productive processes. This view is reinforced by contemporary conditions of global interconnection and by the communicative demands placed on citizens' bilingual repertoires. In Harris's terms, bilingual competence entails an inherent "translation competence"—a form of "natural competence" (Harris, 1977, p. 99). Considered alongside Butzkamm and Caldwell's account of natural bilingualism, it would be counterproductive for classrooms to disregard the full range of learners' natural competences, including translation.

Read beyond the numbers, the pattern in our data suggests that teachers in our sample increasingly accept translation as a legitimate classroom activity for learning and teaching language. This interpretation challenges a common claim of monolingual methodologies—that translation belongs exclusively to professional training contexts. Fraser (1996, p. 121) describes this as an "artificial barrier" erected between professional translation and pedagogical translation. Given that more than half of the world's population is bilingual or multilingual (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 3), language education must prepare learners for communicative situations that exceed the limits of narrowly monolingual approaches. One implication is the development of bi- or multilingual syllabuses that integrate authentic texts and routinely address linguistic and cultural contingencies.

Finally, our investigation of whether translation fosters cross-cultural understanding did not yield the strong positive consensus we anticipated. Descriptive statistics

show a sizeable proportion of neutral responses and a near balance between agreement and disagreement. A plausible explanation is that many teachers have not systematically leveraged translation to surface intercultural contrasts within mainstream classroom practice. The CPGE context may add complexity: students are prepared for international (often French) examinations, and some pursue extended study in French institutions. On this basis, we suggest that teachers' generally positive stance toward translation as a pedagogical resource could be extended to explore its intercultural potential more deliberately. In increasingly fluid communities, there is an opportunity (and a need) to use translation as a safe, structured space for negotiating differences of meaning between local and global contexts, including engagement with the "untranslatable" or culturally incompatible.

VII. CONCLUSION

In keeping with the monolingual and communicative orientations that have shaped much of modern language teaching, translation has long been marginalized within mainstream pedagogy. This article has sought to reopen the debate by re-examining the traditional objections to translation in light of recent data from teachers who regularly incorporate translation tasks into their practice. The findings offer compelling evidence that translation deserves a more central place in mainstream EFL education in Morocco, as it enhances not only learners' linguistic competence but also their metalinguistic awareness.

We hope that the arguments presented here encourage EFL teachers to draw more deliberately on learners' existing linguistic repertoires and to consider translation as a legitimate, pedagogically meaningful resource within contemporary language-teaching methodologies.

VIII. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This article has argued for the integration of translation into the EFL classroom. However, given the limited scope of the study, it was not possible to explore additional areas in which translation may contribute to the EFL learning process. Within the CEFR, translation is now recognized as a form of mediation, a perspective that opens new avenues for further research and pedagogical experimentation in the Moroccan context. It is also worth noting that the statistical data presented here were drawn exclusively from Moroccan CPGE English teachers. Future research would therefore benefit from collecting a broader and more diverse dataset that includes teachers from various educational settings across Morocco. Such

expansion would enable a more comprehensive reassessment of the pedagogical validity of translation—whether to support its wider reintegration or to challenge it—based on well-substantiated, empirically grounded arguments.

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Ahalya: The Enigma of Purity and Pollution - Intertextuality Between Valmiki's Ahalya and Other Ahalyas

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Abstract— *The parallels and variations between discourses in the form of a novel, a short story, and a short film with the shared theme and characters from the legendary story Ahalya, an excerpt from The Ramayana, sparked this study. The originality of these works that observed the hipogram (prior literary works) was deemed greater in this study. Intertextuality, on the other hand, is essentially a study of an author's level of originality in creating a new literary work after reading earlier literary works. The purpose of this study was to describe intertextuality in terms of similarities and differences as seen through the lens of expansion and alteration. This study was a qualitative investigation with a descriptive method. The findings of this study revealed that the hipograms (the tale of Ahalya) have an intertextuality relationship with the epic Ramayana by Valmiki and are viewed from the perspective of feminism.*



Keywords— *Intertextuality; Ahalya's Tale; the Ramayana; Several Discourses*

I. INTRODUCTION

Mythology is a gem of historical civilization, and all past civilizations had their own mythology. Even today, mythology is valued in every culture around the world. Indian as well as Greek mythology are widely read myths today, as well as always. As stated by the French theorist Laurent Jenny, there are some writings that are explicitly intertextual and others that are not.

In India and around the world innumerable seminars, poetic discourses, debates presentations and conferences have been on in English and in regional languages and also a lot of discourses have intertextuality with the Ramayana around the globe.(Shet, 2021) Not only the whole of The Ramayana but, even extracts of it are told, retold or recreated million times. One such episode is the tale of Ahalya.

Ahalya's story is told in several versions of the Ramayana and several Hindu Puranas, as well as vernacular literature, dance dramas, plays, and other adaptations. The story of

Ahalya is told in traditional versions to glorify and demonstrate Lord Rama's divine qualities and humanitarian gestures. Many current renditions of the narrative are told from the perspective of the gender to highlight the unequal and unjust treatment of women in traditional Hindu culture.

As stated in numerous Hindu scriptures, Ahalya was lured by Indra (the lord of the Gods), who had a long-held romantic interest in her. Numerous accounts forgive Ahalya of her guilt, claiming that she was duped by Indra's cunning and succumbed to his overtures. In one story, Indra requested the assistance of the moon, who appeared at midnight disguised as a cock crowed. Gautama stepped out, thinking it was time for morning ablutions, and Indra took advantage of the occasion by dressing up as Gautama and seducing her.

But she was cursed by Gautama to be a stone for many years. Madame Bovary's death is comparable to Ahalya's immovable curse. The following description is an example of male chauvinism taken from the death-bed scene:

"The priest dipped his right thumb in the oil and began the functions; first on the eyes, which had so coveted all earthly splendors; then on the nostrils, which had loved warm breezes and amorous perfumes; then on the mouth, which had opened for falsehood; had groaned with pride and cried out in lust; finally on the soles of the feet, which had once run so swiftly to the assuaging of her desires, and now would walk no more." (345)

Intertextuality has been extensively studied, yet there is a glaring gap in its examination as a cross-cultural phenomenon, specifically for Indian literary works. Hence, this study, which investigates the relationship between the legendary tale of Ahalya and selected discourses employs intertextuality as a hermeneutical technique that allows for an exploration of the thematic echoes between the tale and the discourses. Also, it investigates to verify whether in other renditions of the narrative, whether Ahalya is severely cursed/punished for her infidelity.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many research studies on intertextuality in general and comparative analysis of Ahalya's character with characters from other discourses who were accused of sinning or being sinned against.

Shet's (2021) study investigated intertextuality between Indian films and Indian epic, *The Ramayana*. Abood (2015), Sirhan (2014), Ayasrah & Azmi (2019), and Sultan and Rai'a (2007) chose Arabic poetry and looked at the intertextuality between it and T. S. Elliot's poetry. On Darwish's poems also there were numerous studies of intertextuality. (Halabi & Alawi, 2021, Issa & Daragmeh, 2018 and Snir, 2008).

Shet's (2021) study explored the way the Ramayana, one of India's two great epics, was contextually borrowed in contemporary Indian films Ravana in Tamil (Ravana in Hindi), Ravana Prabhu. (Malayalam), and Judgmental Hai Kya (Hindi, 2019), as well as Mahatma Gandhi's autobiography. The research extended into many of its adaptations, interpretations, and excerpts in Indian, World, and Renaissance literature and visual arts, as well as contemporary works.

With reference to T. S. Eliot and Al Sayyab, the aim of Ayasrah & Azmi's (2019) study was to provide light on "intertextuality" as a cross-cultural strategy between contemporary Arabic and English poetry. It intended to shed light on how Eliot and Al Sayyab's texts interact in terms of "allusion," "symbols and myths," "irony," "the objective equivalent," "conceptual metaphor," and "impersonality," as well as the influence of Eliot's ideas, subjects, and writing style on Al Sayyab's. However, the

research showed that the intertextuality technique only works in one direction, i.e., from Eliot to Al Sayyab, and Eliot's influence can be clearly seen in Al Sayyab's poetry. Al Sayyab has also appropriated some of Eliot's most important phrases, concepts, symbols, myths, and themes, but he could still use intertextuality effectively and keep his eminent style.

Here are some accurate comparisons of Ahalya's personality. The first one focuses on Puthumai Pithan's two short stories. The second contrast is between Ahalya and Madame Bovary.

Arulmugil's (n.d.) study the two tales of Puthumai Pithan that are based on the life of Ahalya "*Ahalikai*" and "*Sabavimochanam*". These tales reveal how the same author gave the Ahalya myth two different interpretations. The awful fate of Ahalya was shown in both tales in many ways; essentially, she was unable to identify Indra. Her utter devotion to her husband was evident. In the former tale, it was described how Gautama pardoned Indra and Ahalya; in the later tale, Ahalya was brought back to life by Rama's touch, but society never accepted her. Finally, she concluded that Rama was not the ideal person to grant her redemption because he had harmed the innocent Sita and caused Ahalya to turn back into stone. Arulmugil concludes his study by saying the redemption of Ahalya is emphasized in both the tales. A calm analysis of such circumstances would reveal that they are merely representations of obstacles we encounter daily. The moral tests they contain are there for our benefit. The Ahalya story teaches us that, no matter how serious a transgression is, one can still aspire to be absolved from its effects via repentance and punishment. We should examine our own souls and work to rid them of all negative thoughts rather than judging others for their transgressions. The only difference between Ahalya and Madame Bovary, according to Swathika (2016), is in the narrations of their stories. Ahalya's myth did not articulate her opinions and desires, whereas Madame Bovary's voice wandered throughout the book but is never appropriately addressed. Both women conceptualized their husbands as their own dreams of adoration hoping for a new life, failing to which they fell into the act of transgressions. Madame Bovary and Ahalya were both trapped in the moral code disparities, or the conceptions that primarily benefited men and neglected to include these women by marginalizing their perspectives.

This study examines feminism in Kavita Kane's novel Ahalya's Awakening. The study investigates the way the rhetoric of a mythological character rises and challenges society's patriarchal notions. It delves into the multifaceted exploitation of women, as well as their difficulties, sorrows, and subjection in a patriarchal culture.

Although intertextuality has received much investigation, few scholars have examined it in Indian myths, stories, and epics. This research probes into the conceptual resonances between, the tale of Ahalya and the discourses that were named after the tale's female protagonist Ahalya.

III. METHODOLOGY

After reading Koral Das Gupta's Ahalya and Kavitha Kane's Ahalya Awakening, seeing Sujoy Gosh's short film Ahalya, and studying the original Valmiki story Ahalya, the essential cross points between the creators are found and examined to extract the shared sequences. Additionally, the characteristics of their intertextuality are used to define the parameters of the comparison tale for this phenomenon. The qualitative data analysis method is used to analyze the study's data because it works with literary materials. As a result, the reciprocal intertextual scenes are identified and categorized according to the appropriate pattern of "objectivity, sinned/sinned against." Examining and analyzing the stories allows for an investigation into each of these factors. The results are then concluded and discussed to arrive at the conclusions.

IV. RESULTS

Intertextuality

Julia Kristeva first used it in 1966 when she said that many concepts, ideas, and meanings are intersectional. She also asserts that since texts are intertextual and each one contains another, there is no such thing as brand-new, original text. Since every literary text is influenced by other earlier writings, Kristeva also holds that one author cannot produce a literary work entirely on their own (Allen, 2011). Also, Julia Kristeva, the French sophist, defines a discourse as "a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (Kristeva, 1986, p. 66).

According to Gadavani (2002), intertextuality is a tool that creates an overlapping between texts and fosters a culture of understanding among various text types. Intertextuality is a key technique used by poets when creating new poetry, stories, novels, plays, and even spoken texts. The listener is not presented with the author's literary thoughts with the same ease as in spoken language. The splendour of literary style, which frequently conceals indirect messages and generates unseen interpretations to convey them to the writer and his audience, is what sets it apart from everyday language (Fabb, 2010). Intertextuality may nevertheless present many different forms, including plagiarism, insinuation, citation, interpretation, pastiche, and spoofing (Hallo, 2010). The three areas of intertextuality are

obligatory, facultative, and accidental. The intertextuality can be explicit or implicit one.

Selected Works

The following three discourses were studied to investigate whether they have intertextuality with the tale of Ahalya in *The Ramayana*. Sujoy Ghosh's 14-minute short film *Ahalya, short stories: Kavitha Kane's Ahalya Awakening (2019) and Koral Dasgupta's Ahalya (2020)*

The following are the results of intertextuality between the chosen discourses and Valmiki's Ramayana

Ghosh's Ahalya

Sujoy Ghosh, best known for his 2012 film *Kahaani*, has written a script with a scary twist at the final moments. The short film begins with the ringing of a calling bell, and an investigating officer searching for a missing individual enters the home of Goutam Sadhu, a well-known artist, to question him. The lovely Ahalya (Radhika Apte) opens the door. The film is based on Ahalya's fabled story. In the Ramayana, Ahalya, the most beautiful of Lord Bramha's creations, marries Gautama, a much older sage. Lord Indra, who is smitten by her beauty, disguises himself as her husband and attempts to seduce her. The sage curses Ahalya and Indra for the former's infidelity. Ahalya is transformed into a stone, only when Ram's foot contacts the cursed stone that is Ahalya after the curse, she is freed from the spell. In Sujoy Ghosh's short film, the heroine, who is also named Ahalya, is an outstanding beauty, much like the mythical Ahalya. Her husband's name is likewise Gautam Sadhu, and the third significant character, the inspector, is called after Lord Indra. Sujoy, on the other hand, the filmmaker brilliantly weaves myth and legend, employs all props, and creates a masterpiece of tale that articulates of an iconoclastic yearning to abolish patriarchal preconceptions. Seducers are punished and transformed into statues.

Koral Dasgupta's Ahalya

Author Koral Dasgupta shifts the focus to another sexual relationship altogether. Koral ventures to an alternative reading of Ahalya's character. (Sahu, 2020)

The story of Ahalya is beautifully summarized by the author as:

It is just one single moment of weakness, that momentary lapse of judgement – that is all it takes for us to make us lose our all in our struggle between good and bad, right and wrong, allowing the wrong to win.

The book, which is based on Indian mythology, is phenomenal. The writer excels in describing emotions in

detail. The narrative has several references to adulteries, particularly those committed by Indra. However, the author recognizes the boundary between sensuality and vulgarity. In these aspects, not a single sentence needs to be altered. But there are several fascinating areas where the emotions and togetherness between a male and female are explored. For that, the reader needs to have respect for the author.

The depiction of Ahalya has profound implications in today's culture since she raises concerns which eventually form the foundation for contemporary feminist thought. Kavita Kane succeeded in doing the story courtesy by detailing the justifications for the three main characters Ahalya, Gautam and Indra. choices and the three's friendship.

Kane's Ahalya

Kane draws attention to a brief passage from Hindu mythology and emphasizes its applicability to contemporary societies struggling with issues like adultery, loyalty, divorce, and patriarchy. She portrays Ahalya as an aspirational lady seeking an identity apart from her appealing looks. Ahalya, the royal daughter of King Mudgal and Queen Nalayani, is not merely gorgeous, but also courageous and intellectual. Her mother intends for Ahalya to marry Indra Shakra, but Ahalya has different goals and desires. Unlike other female members of the royal family, she desires to further her education. She aspires to be a skilled rishika. Her dreams are faced with strong opposition. As their kingdom prepares for war with their neighbours, she is transported to Gautama rishi's ashram for safety. We observe Ahalya's life blooming as a student, a learner, and eventually as a wife and mother in the ashram. The husband-wife relationship deteriorates over time as Gautama strives to balance his roles as a guru and a husband. When Indra learns Ahalya's solitude and cravings, Fate plays a wicked game. He enters her chamber, disguised as Gautama. Despite knowing who the man lying next to her is, Ahalya falls into the arms of the man who has been pursuing her for a long time. The curse of an infuriated Gautama transforms her into stone. Rama liberates her after she lives in great penance. However, Ahalya's journey does not stop there in Kane's rendition. Years later, she runs upon Sita, who has relocated to the forests with her sons. The unexpected meeting of these two powerful women, who have been stigmatised by society and abandoned by their loved ones, concludes Ahalya's Awakening perfectly. Even though Ahalya's narrative is well known, Ahalya's Awakening does not portray Ahalya as a victim. The readers are introduced through Kavita Kane's interpretation.

Even though Ahalya's narrative is well known, Ahalya's Awakening does not portray Ahalya as a victim. Kavita Kane's interpretation introduces readers to a brave lady who

is not afraid to admit her weaknesses; she is aware of her desires, transgressions, and repercussions. Ultimately, a decent retelling of a renowned legendary story, with a fresh take on a character who has typically been portrayed as a modest woman.

Also, Ahalya has intertextuality with the Greek Mythological character Daphane. In Greek mythology, Apollo, Zeus's son, pursued Daphne, a young nymph. "Daphne prayed for help from the river God Peneus or Gaia" (Schipper 2). And she is transformed into a tree, 'Laurel' (Barnard 137). Legend has it that her feet changed into roots, her hair into leaves, and her arms were transformed into branches. Her busts morph into the tree's thin bark. But her innocence and radiant attractiveness survived undamaged in the case. The *Metamorphoses* is a narrative poem written by the great Roman poet Ovid (43 BC - 17 or 18 CE). The book is a mythic-historical narrative that describes the Creation of the World and continues to the time of Julius Caesar (Schipper 1-6). Daphne's story is presented in this work of literature. Generally, both mythologies are quite identical. In Greek mythology, the Gods live in Mount Olympus, and the Titans were the antithesis of the Gods. In Hindu culture, Devas are the Gods and the Asuras are their chief enemies who reside in the Hell. In the week Thursday is the day of Zeus as well as Indra, and both are kings of Gods, and they have the same weapon too, the thunder (Schipper 1-6).

V. DISCUSSION

The investigation into the various discourses reveals that *Ahalyas* are objectified, humiliated, and cursed whether they are Indian or Greek, ancient or modern replicas of the legendary Ahalya. The female heroes in *Daphane* and *The Ramayana* are cursed to immobility, while the male perpetrators escape the harsh punishment. The present-day short film, despite attempting to add a feminist touch by turning the male actors into statues, has done nothing to justify the innocent legendary Ahalya, as in this brief movie she turns out to be the seducer of not only the so-called Indra, but also many others. In Kavita Kane's novel *Ahalya's Awakening*, Ahalya gets frustrated with her spouse's lack of interest, and she willingly and knowingly accepts Indra, who has disguised himself as Gautam. Similarly, Koral instills postmodern concepts in Ahalya. According to her, Ahalya is a pleasure seeker.

When Rishi Gautam curses her to become a lifeless stone because of her 'infidelity,' Koral Dasgupta's Ahalya asks, "Long, long ago, when I was still a beginner who was pursuing an identity without a body, I had asked, would the greatest lover known for his rugged energies make love with the soul?" Indra had abandoned his physical form to become

a shapeless identity, casting the same challenge back at me and yet fulfilling it in style, beyond the bounds of time, as no cosmic lover had ever done!" (Ahalya/Koral Dasgupta)

Despite Sujoy Ghosh, the filmmaker brilliantly weaves myth and legend, employing all props, and creating a masterpiece of tale that articulates of an iconoclastic yearning to abolish patriarchal preconceptions, as commended by Narayan, (2022) the director's account is unclear as to whether Gautama uses Ahalya's attractiveness or Ahalya uses Gautam's stature to entice men to her bed. What is heartening is that Ahalya is neither cursed with immovability nor portrayed as a victim. Men are condemned with immovability for their wickedness in Sujoy Ghosh's short film. However she is objectified in Sujoy Gosh's film too, as opined by Gauri Lankesh. (Mirror, 2015) And that was the reason Gosh's modern day version of Ahalya seems to have hurt the sentiments of a certain Hindu organisation, the Akhil Bharatvarshiya Shree Gurjar Gaud Brahmin Samaj, that clamoured a ban on the movie. (Radhika Apte as Sexy Ahalya to Be Banned? Sujoy Ghosh's Chilling Thriller Runs Into Trouble, 2015)

Not only is the legendary Ahalya blamed and cursed by her husband, but contemporary writers also struggle to defend the character despite their desire to do so. The language of a mythological character rises and challenges society's patriarchal ideals in Kavita Kane's novel Ahalya's Awakening. It explores women's varied exploitation as well as their struggles, grief, and subjugation in patriarchal societies. Although it is uplifting that authors are contributing to Ahalya's cause, it is disappointing to see that even the two female writers portray Ahalya in a sensual and sexual way.

In Kambaramayana the lines reiterate Valmiki's charge "and she knew. Yet unable to put aside what was not hers," (Many Ramayanas, n.d.)

Whereas ancient versions of *The Ramayana*, unlike *Kamba Ramayana*, demonstrate her innocence. (Mirror, 2015) For instance, Brahma Purana claims that Ahalya did not recognize Indra. When Indra used to visit the ashram of the sage Gautam, Gautam's disciples failed to recognize him. (*Hidden Secrets of Ahalya's Story in the Ramayana*, 2023) Also there are many who keep trying to proclaim her innocence:

When Lord Rama declares Ahalya to be innocent centuries later, Gautama makes a comeback and takes Ahalya back. (Arunima. 2018b, January 22).

Agaligai recounts the actual incident of Ahalya being seduced by Indra, but it also adds a strange twist of its own. Here, Gautama absolved Ahalya and Indra of their errors. One day, Indra lured Gautama away while she was still half asleep by crowing like a cock. When she realized it was

Indra, she was utterly taken aback. She struck him while "squirming and shaking like a worm that has fallen into fire" (Pudumai Pithan 2000, pp. 131–135). The insightful words of Gautama, "A pure mind alone is true chastity," calmed Ahalya. What can a powerless lady do if her body has been contaminated by chance? (Pudumaippittan 2000:131–135).

According to its etymology, Ahalya refers to someone who is unplowed, pure, or who possesses tremendous beauty and morality. As the wife of a revered and religious sage, she symbolizes a very unusual and complex character in Hindu popular lore. She is also praised for being a Sati and one of the noble Pancha Kanyas. Moreover, Ram worships her after her salvation. (*Hidden Secrets of Ahalya's Story in the Ramayana*, 2023 & Arunima, 2018) In that case it is proven she is innocent and she is wronged against innumerable times by most of the adaptations and renditions of her tale, even if the texts take a gender perspective.

VI. CONCLUSION

Ahalya is cursed by her spouse after being duped by the disguised Indra. The goal of this study was to determine whether her purity is recognized by modern society or whether she is still blamed. The study also probed: Is there intertextuality in the renditions, adaptations of Ahalya?

As far as intertextuality is concerned the study proves that there are other renditions of the narrative of Ahalya, nonetheless in all of them, Ahalya is severely punished for her infidelity. This study finds intertextuality between Valmiki's Ahalya, and the three adaptations taken for the study. In summary, all three discourses clearly bear Valmiki's influence in terms of numerous ideas, subjects, literary devices, and expressions. However, because they are postcolonial interpretations, they adopt a feminist viewpoint. Unfortunately, they fail to do Ahalya, who is sinless but is wronged by her spouse and posterity, justice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Finally, it can be claimed that while intertextuality has been extensively researched in the past, numerous crucial characteristics have not been acknowledged or investigated. For instance, it has not been clearly described how to study intertextuality as a cross-cultural phenomenon between contemporary Indian and English poetry. Future studies can focus on them.

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Exploring the Writing Craft: Alexander Chee's Writing Style and Insights from Other Writers

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Abstract— The present paper explores the writing technique and style while drawing on the insights from other renowned writers, including Annie Dillard, Orhan Pamuk, Amitava Kumar, William Faulkner, Deborah Isenberg, Philip Roth, and Henry James. Derived from his fiction and essays, Chee's perspectives on writing present personal yet instructive view of the writing process. By placing his approach alongside these literary figures, this study examines how writing serves both as an art and as a way of exploring the self. Themes such as, identity, political consciousness, memory and the relationship between fact and fiction are central to this paper. The paper illustrates how Chee's style corresponds with and differs from these writers. On the whole, the paper attempts to shed a light on how the integration of these writers' ideas can inform contemporary writing practices.



Keywords— Fiction, Non-Fiction, Art, Writing, Technique, Essays

Alexander Chee is a Korean-American novelist, essayist, short story writer and editor. He was born on August 21, 1967 in South Kingston, Rhode Island, United States. Chee spent his childhood in Korea, Kauai, Turk, Guam and Maine. Alexander Chee is a professor of nonfiction at Dartmouth College, Hanover. In the book *How to Write an Autobiographical Novel*, some essays mainly deal with his writing craft. These essays are "The Writing Life", "100 Things about Writing a Novel", "The Autobiography of My Novel", "How to Write an Autobiographical Novel" and "On Becoming an American Writer". These pieces of writing are laden with his advice to the students of fiction and nonfiction and to the future writers. In the essay, he forwards his mentor Annie Dillard's advice to the readers. Chee obediently followed her and made his own thinking and style of writing after learning from her. Annie taught her students to describe all the deaths, accidents and diseases at the beginning of their work where they are possible to add. "Where possible" was her rejoinder as Chee tells, it is suggestive

of adding things where they are possible to add. She focussed on the correct use of verbs. According to her, inability to use the appropriate verb leads to the use of the adverb.

He does not use the words 'pretty', 'beautiful' or 'cute', while describing a girl, but describes her features that shows her pretty, beautiful, and cute. He describes the girl as having "golden hair and rosy cheeks, pink lipped and fair" (*The Queen* 4). The job of a writer is to write and do that in such a manner that the reader feels the way the writer felt or wants the reader to feel. He feels that there is no need to tell the reader what to feel (*How to Write* 51). The description of the girl makes the reader imagine and understand that girl is pretty. These are the important things which make all the differences. The grammar, structure and themes are the main aspects that form the writing collaboratively. Chee was told by Annie not to add emotional language because it turns the lines grey. A good book does not tell the reader about how a character is

feeling, rather it describes the person in a manner that the reader himself understands the psyche of the character. When the writer describes everything, the reader has nothing to see. Writer should be specific about everything. For example, instead of using the word 'angry', he should describe the action of the person, which shows him angry (*How to Write* 51).

Chee recommends daily practice of writing. Chee waited tables for four years and wrote his debut novel *Edinburgh* during this time. He learnt from his job about the norms of society which later helped him in writing. He wrote *Edinburgh*, as he tells in the essay "My Parade", "On the subway, going back and forth to the restaurants, and sometimes I wrote it while at work. I still have a guest check with an outline that came to me while I waited for my section to be seated" (116).

A novel needs careful handling. When a novelist is writing a novel he feels and looks at the various faces of the novel which seem different at different levels. A novel is free to choose its duration of completion. The novel is 'a liberator' to choose its time of formation (*How to Write* 139). The story, sometimes, distracts the writer, who is in line with incomplete or unmet endings. Sometimes a writer knows the ending from the start but the novel crosses a long path to meet its ending. The novel asks a question about what the writer or reader wants from it and answers the same itself. Novel makes the reader as well as the writer feel that everything it includes is only about him. According to Chee, these things are like a trick to keep both the writer and the reader sticking to the book. In addition, a novel is a kind of lie, which enforces the reader and writer to consider it true.

Annie Dillard, in her famous book *The Writing Life* (1989), talks about the art of writing. The opening sentence of the book tells us that a sentence is the tool of a writer, which she calls 'a line of words', "when you write, you lay out a line of words. The line of words is a miner's pick, a woodcarver's gouge, a surgeon's probe" (Dillard 549). A Sentence is everything to a writer. Structure of the sentences and the arrangement of words form the basis of any writing. According to her, writing is an interesting process but is also difficult and complex to engage in. It needs a great deal of knowledge of everything. The life in writing is free from everything and also free for everything. She simply suggests that writing provides the fullest freedom, as she says in the same source, "putting a book together is interesting and exhilarating. It is sufficiently difficult and complex that it engages all our intelligence. It is life at its most free" (555). She relates writing with the act of spinning that is full of dare and interest, "the sensation of writing a book is the sensation of

spinning, blinded by love and daring" (594). Writing takes all our interest, but we are unaware of the result that is a little bit daring. Her advice to the new writers and students of creative writing follows:

One of the few things I know about writing is this; spend it all, shoot it, play it, lose it, all, right away, every time. Do not hoard what seems good for a later place in the book, or for another book; give it, give it all, give it now. The impulse to save something good for a better place later is the signal to spend it now. Something more will arise for later, something better. (Dillard 597)

She says that writing needs our full attention. There is nothing like saving the idea for the future project. Something better and fresh will arrive in future, here we can use Annie's idea of 'spend it all'. Chee, in an interview with *Poets & Writers*, says, "Fiction is the thing you invent to fit the shape of what you learned and nonfiction is the thing you invent to fit the shape of what you found or may be even what you can't run away from". Here he expresses the idea that fiction helps us in creating paths for the ideas developed in our mind, and what we have gained and nonfiction helps us to draw out the things that we perceive. About this difference between fiction and nonfiction, in an interview with *Dartmouth News*, he says, "I think of essays being a hunch that I then research, and fiction as being a hunch that runs away with me".

He relates writing to gardening. In a talk with the *Write or Die* Tribe he says that he writes "a bit like a gardener was moving from plant to plant..." he is very fond of gardening and it gives him the same satisfaction and peace of mind as writing does. He suggests that a writer should have the characteristics of a gardener. There should be calmness and care to handle the process of writing and the habit of moving from one plant to the other and noticing them gradually. Writing needs diversity like a garden as it is full of different species of the plants. Writing is also a collage made of diverse things that can be seen from various perspectives.

About writing an autobiographical novel, he has added a particular essay in the book *How to Write an Autobiographical Novel* with the same title. He suggests the reader to "invent something that fits the shape of what you know" and "to do this use, the situation, but not the events of your life" (246). *Edinburgh* is his semi-autobiographical novel and in this novel, he neither uses his name and identity nor does he add the events of his life but merely adds the situations. He puts Fee, the protagonist of the novel, in situations from his own life. He invents a character like him but not him, as he talks about creating

an autobiographical character, "If you are a professor, then the character is a professor. If you are tall, he is tall. Angry, then angry. But then change other things that will make the difference" (247). In the novel *The Queen of the Night*, he has used the situations from his own life. The recurring themes of identity, loneliness and struggle that run through the novel seems to be drawn from his own life.

Chee is of the view that becoming a writer is the choice of one's own self. No one can make a person a 'writer'. A teacher can only polish the skill of the student, and teach the rules and formulas of good writing. He does not know whether his students can become writers or not. It depends on the student whether he wants to be one (*How to Write* 250).

Chee finds that there are several things which may stop a writer from writing autobiographical content. There are some stories a writer wants to tell but unable to do so because of fear and hesitation. Some have fear that it may destroy their family reputation and relationship. When the imagination of creating a story fails then this fear occurs. While teaching the students of creative writing he discovered that he "needed to teach not just how to write, but how to keep writing" (*How to Write* 257). He teaches his students to "stand up and leave the room of your [student's] mind" so that one can write and live peacefully (*How to Write* 257).

In the field of writing, there are many writers known for their writing style and their guidance on writing to the aspirants. Further, this paper will explore some other important writers contributing to the craft of writing and how these writers have their own ways of writing different from the others.

Amitava Kumar is an Indian writer, journalist, and critic. He mentions, in an interview with the *Public Books*, how he learned writing without any training. In response to a question, he says that he learnt from other people by turning them into his mentors. He has read Philip Roth, but never met him. He has read works of Michael Ondaatje and met him later. He has read them with great attention. He has always wished for a mentor for himself but he found them on the bookshelf in his room, as he says, "[...] I have the books that are my models – I've got Roth, I've got Ben Lerner, I've got Teju Cole, I've got Claudia Rankine, I've got these books by Maggie Nelson. I'm learning by making them my mentors by myself" (*Public Books*). About the politics of his writing, he tells that he always focusses on the representation of ordinary life in writing and other works of art. He favours the writing which brings the different things together like a collage because it gives a fix to

contemporary reality. He considers writing to be like drawing and photography because they both produce a picture, one in the mind and the other on the paper. Therefore, the art of writing is equal to other arts because of the same characteristics. For Chee writing is gardening, and for Amitava Kumar it is like drawing and photography. It is so because every art has the same purpose of representation of life.

Orahan Pamuk, a Turkish writer, born in Istanbul is well known for his novels, which mainly carries his homeland as the major theme. His noteworthy works are *Cedet Bey and His Sons* (1982), *The Silent House* (1983), *The White Castel* (1985), *The Black Book* (1990), *The New Life* (1994), *My Name Is Red* (1998), *Snow* (2002). His book *Istanbul: Memories and the City* (2003) is about his childhood and youth and about his native place. In an interview with the *Paris Review*, he talks about his own environment of writing. He says that for writing there should be a place separate from the daily routine. He is of the view that sometimes "domestic rituals and details" kill the imagination of the writer. In daily domestic life, the mind thinks of various things, which fades the imagination. Pamuk writes at the time when he is away from home. He has a little separate place especially for writing. He had been leaving his home as an employee, and after spending the whole day out and came back home. He has worked for ten hours daily. He likes to sit and write like a child playing with toys. For him writing is work but fun and games also. He recommends a separate place and environment to give words to the imagination, without any outer obstruction. Imagination needs a special attention to get a form on the piece of paper. On the other hand, Chee is of the view that there is no special time for writing.

William Faulkner, the renowned American writer, is known for his novels, short stories, screenplays, essays, poetry and drama. He is the creator of the fictional place named Yoknapatawpha County. Most of his novels are set in this fictional place. His well-known works of fiction are *The Sound and The Fury* (1929), *As I Lay Dying* (1930), *Light in August* (1932), and *Absalom, Absalom* (1936). In an interview with the *Paris Review*, he expresses his views on his own self as a writer. He gives all the importance to the creation of the artist i.e. the works or the novel. He says that if he had not existed, someone else would have written like him. He says that any work of art, writing, a play and a novel is more important than the writer. As he says:

The artist is of no importance. Only what he creates is important, since there is nothing new to be said. Shakespeare, Balzac, Homer, have all written about

the same things, and if they had lived one thousand or two thousand years longer, the publisher wouldn't have needed anymore since. (*Paris Review*)

He says that the individuality of the writer is important to the writer himself, and no one else cares about it. A writer is always keen to make his work better. He always wants to polish and nourish it. In his opinion:

If I [Faulkner] could write all my work again, I am convinced that I would do it better, which is the healthiest condition for an artist. That's why he [the writer] keeps on working, trying again; he believes each time that this time he will do it, bring it off. (*Paris Review*)

Faulkner considers himself as a failure poet. He thinks that maybe every novelist tries at poetry first when fails and then goes for a short story but finally picks up the novel. He says that talent, discipline, and hard work are the most important things to become a novelist. He wants the writer to never be satisfied with his work. Craving for something new and better should always be there. According to Faulkner, writer should be responsible for his art only. He needs to be ruthless for this. Faulkner is of the view that art does not need any particular environment, on the other side there is Pamuk, who needs a special place to write. Faulkner is of the view that the environment an artist needs is:

Whatever peace, whatever solitude, and whatever pleasure he can get at not too high a cost. All the wrong environment will do is run his blood pressure up; he will spend more time being frustrated or outraged. My own experience has been that the tools I need for my trade are paper, tobacco, food and a little whisky. (*Paris Review*)

Deborah Eisenberg is an American short-story writer and teacher. She is a professor of writing at Columbia University. Alexander Chee was her student. In an interview with *Paris Review*, she shares her precious views on the writing craft. To her, writing gives a feeling of peace to the writer. Writing is like therapy and it affects the mind of the writer positively. For her the real form of writing is the "experience of making a set of given yield". She says that writing has many rigid and "inflexible set of instruments" i.e. vocabulary, grammar, symbols and the limit of the power of expressing oneself. These can be made a little flexible with some effort. Eisenberg is very careful about the point of view of the writer. On this part, she says that it is like looking through a microscope and adjusting the focus on it, "everything depends upon how

close you want to bring the naked object to the naked eye.... Depends on what you want to magnify and what power" (*Paris Review*).

Philip Roth (1933-2018), an American novelist and short-story writer is well known for his autobiographical details in his fiction and for its sensual style. His noteworthy works include *Goodbye, Columbus* (1959), *American Pastoral* (1997), *The Human Stain* (2000). He was a teacher of creative writing at the University of Iowa and Princeton University. He, in an interview with *NPR* says that writing is like jumping on a trampoline. With every jumping up and coming down, a new idea arrives in the mind of the writer. When a writer sits to write, random ideas take place in his mind and change the existing ones. The work of a writer is completed only when he has nothing to say more or when he has answered all the questions that occurred in his mind during writing. He says, "Part of being a writer is being able to read what you've written and see what's missing, see what needs development, see what's suggested by what you write" (*NPR*). He suggests editing the work and adding new things according to the need of the story. In an interview with Terry Gross on *NPR*, about the beginning of the book he says:

You begin every book as an amateur and as a dummy. And in the writing, you discover the book. Of course, you're in charge. But gradually by writing sentence after sentence, the book, as it were, reveals itself through your language. (*NPR*)

There is a need to learn to sit still and to pay attention to writing. He has been quoted as saying, in *Daily Rituals* by Mason Currey:

Writing isn't hard work. It's a nightmare.... There's a tremendous uncertainty that's built into the profession, a sustained level of doubt that supports you in some way. A good doctor isn't in a battle with his work. In most professions there's beginning, a middle, and an end. With writing, it's always beginning again. Temperamentally, we need that newness. There is a lot of repetition in the work. In fact, one skill that every writer needs is the ability to sit still in the deeply uneventful business. (*Daily Rituals*)

Alexander Chee in an interview with *The Toast* was questioned about the writing of fiction and nonfiction at the same time. Chee was writing *The Queen of The Night*, and *How to Write an Autobiographical Novel* at the

same time. He responded in the favour of both that they both are important. He replied:

Both fiction and nonfiction are investigation happenings inside of limits. I do think they have different limits and that these limits matter, formally, in the way limits matter to a sestina or a sonnet. This is very reductive, but for me the differences are, in fiction, a character sets the limit and in nonfiction, the character of the author sets the limit. (*The Toast*)

Further, he says, in fiction and nonfiction the difference is that from fiction there is the demand of a "trustworthy guarantee of good time", on the other side from nonfiction a "trustworthy guarantee of wisdom". According to him, novels and essays or fiction and nonfiction can be written at the same time and it helps the writer to exist among the readers. He says that novels are sort of greedy because they need full time. If a writer only focuses on the novel at one time his career can go empty. Novels need full attention; they are not fast happening. Novel is a gradual process to be crafted beautifully. *Edinburgh* and *The Queen* are beautiful examples from his side.

Henry James, an American-British novelist and psychological realist of the age, in the essay, *The Art of Fiction* (1884), talks about the art of fiction. This essay was a response to Walter Besant's remarks on fiction in his article. For Henry James fiction is "a personal direct impression of life..." (29), and this representation of life plays an important role in the existence of the novel (25). He says that novel is like pudding that could only be swallowed and enjoyed (24). He has the view that any art lives with "discussion, upon experiment, upon curiosity, upon variety of attempt, upon the exchange of views and the comparison of standpoints..." (24). Therefore, a novel needs all this.

Further Henry James talks of the content and the form of the novel. Both the idea and the form are incomplete without the other, as James expresses, "The story and the novel, the idea and the form, are the needle and thread, and I [Henry James] never heard of a guild of tailors who recommended the use of thread without the needle, or the needle without the thread" (40). In any work of art, novel, short story, poem and play form and idea are closely woven. These are inseparable because one supports the other to give a meaningful result. As he has said that novels are the representation of life, he also has the view that moral and artistic sense are in a close relationship because the "deepest quality of a work of art will be the

quality of the mind of the producer" (44). The work of art presents the writer himself.

Alexander Chee's style of writing is an example of fine balance. He presents his own life through the character but he is not the character. Fee from *Edinburgh* tells the story of Chee, but he is not Chee. *The Queen of the Night* raises the struggle to come out of the difficult situations and the quest for identity. Here the protagonist is female, having a struggle in mind and in real life, it shows many similarities. In the book *How to Write an Autobiographical Novel*, he presents a balanced craft of writing. Here he tells the story from childhood to becoming a successful writer. While presenting his own journey of life, he is also a teacher of writing through the book. The book helps the reader with his biographical details and teaches them how to write the novel and the essays.

Alexander Chee, from his works, shows some of the most important facts of writing. From the book of the essays, we understand that a writer should discuss or speak about everything in his life through the writing. In *How to Write an Autobiographical Novel*, the essays show every aspect of his life from his childhood to his adulthood, whether it deals with the inferiority because of his race, face and sexual identity. He follows the rule of speaking freely because art is free from everything, so he writes what he wants to write instead of what other people want him to write. He writes his own thoughts while keeping the reader in mind always. In the essay "The Curse", he talks about his desire and attraction for men. He may hide it because of the fear of society, but he writes his mind and heart on paper truthfully and he narrates everything about life. He teaches his students to write not like him but like their own self, as Annie taught him, not to write like her but their own self. Chee, in a way, is suggesting to the readers and writers that writing is an adequate way to express your life to the people.

Alexander Chee's approach to writing, deeply introspective and politically conscious, offers a compelling model for understanding the craft. By examining his work alongside the insights of writers such as Annie Dillard, Amitava Kumar, Orhan Pamuk, William Faulkner, Deborah Isenberg, Philip Roth, and Henry James, this study highlights the multifaceted nature of storytelling. Chee's ability to blend personal narrative with broader historical and cultural themes mirrors the techniques of these literary figures while also forging a distinct path. His reflections on memory, identity, and the role of the writer underscore the transformative power of literature.

To conclude, this paper reveals that writing is both an art and an act of engagement—with the self, with

history, and with society. Chee's craft exemplifies how writers navigate the intersection of truth and imagination, demonstrating that storytelling is not merely a means of expression but a way of understanding the world. By integrating the techniques and philosophies of these writers, contemporary authors can continue to evolve the literary landscape, using the written word as both a mirror and a lens.

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The Impact, Perceptions, and Attitudes Toward Learning English Through a Blended Learning Approach

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Abstract— The development of e-learning tools and Learning Management System (LMS) has offered considerable opportunities to teachers to increase student engagement and academic achievement and course satisfaction. Despite the fact that blended learning (BL) is a commonly used method in teaching the English language all over the world, its implementation in the Indian context of higher education is relatively new. Due to the changing technological and pedagogical needs, the colleges and universities in India are now adopting the use of information and communication technologies to come up with more efficient pedagogical approaches. This paper examines the perceptions and attitudes of students towards blended learning and the effects of blended learning, as well as its influence on the performance of the English language. A quantitative research approach was used, and the data collection was carried out by means of an online survey among 40 students of the MIT ADT University, India. The results show that students have rather positive attitudes to blended learning, and its application can be regarded as a factor that promotes positively the process of English language teaching and learning. This study thus contributes to the existing knowledge on blended learning practices in Indian higher education and promotes further adoption of blended learning models in Indian higher education to improve the effectiveness of instruction and student achievement.



Keywords— Blended Learning (BL), English Language Teaching (ELT), Student Perceptions, Student Attitudes, Higher Education, Learning Management Systems (LMS), E-learning, Language Acquisition, Academic Performance, Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

I. INTRODUCTION

The world is always changing, and these changes have an effect on various areas as well. Even in the field of education, there is no exception. The emergence of digital learning platforms has had a profound effect on educational establishments, ultimately displacing conventional methods. This gave rise to the term "Blended Learning," which describes conventional in-person instruction in the classroom. The ramifications, including the merits and demerits of the new BL method, are widely discussed. Whether we liked it or not, there were no other options for online education during the pandemic. The BL strategy allowed for the delivery of education during the pandemic. Indeed, education will continue despite any barriers in the

way. Information about the Approach to English language instruction is provided by this study. BL is replacing traditional classroom instruction as education changes. As they strive to integrate online learning and gain the skills required to oversee the virtual classroom while taking technological innovation into account through Management, educators, parents, and students all face new challenges. Today, BL is growing in popularity, but there is still much work to be done. One domain where BL is widely utilised is in the teaching of English as a first, second, or foreign language. It is a hands-on method of teaching that blends traditional and online methods.

The use of BL methods has noticeably increased in contemporary pedagogical settings. Learners have been

taking advantage of this new method, especially since the pandemic's arrival, and continue to use it to improve academic performance. No technology can indeed replace teachers and traditional approaches with new online methods or any advent of technology. Nevertheless, new methods, approaches, and technological tools will reshape the education pattern that we will have no option but to adopt in the near future.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The present study focuses on the attitudes and perceptions of learners towards BL and the major impact of blended learning. Over the past few years, substantial research has been done on blended learning. However, studies carried out in the past suggest that BL can be explored more in more areas. In various studies, the term BL in teaching and learning the English language has been given adequate attention to the question of how BL impacts the language teaching and learning process.

This educational approach combines in-person and online activities with synchronous and asynchronous learning resources to set up learning processes that are as effective as possible. The term "blended learning" describes the educational strategy of combining more conventional in-person classroom instruction with digital learning materials. Learners should be able to use digital technologies to influence the speed or subjects of their learning. Along with blended learning, the flipped classroom is also one of the approaches that help learners make use of online and offline teaching modes. English language instruction and acquisition have been studied by numerous scholars. According to the reviewed literature, BL improves students' overall learning outcomes and language acquisition. According to this viewpoint, the current study aims to review a few studies that concentrate on students' attitudes and perceptions regarding the use of BL in English language instruction.

BL as a method or technique is a popular word nowadays. BL is used extensively during covid-19 and now it has become the new normal. Learners find the BL method more convenient as they get an opportunity to learn the subject at their own pace. Although BL is familiar to everyone in the educational sector, Smith J. and Elliott M. introduced BL as a type of learning mode in 2001; according to them, it is based on behaviourism, constructivism, connectionism, and other learning theories. BL integrates traditional classroom learning with virtual learning while being inspired, supervised, and directed by teachers, considering academic interactions and learning preferences. (Yan, 2020)

Furthermore, BL promotes collaboration, streamlining the evaluation process, giving references, and increasing

student engagement to enhance their language learning abilities. (Hashemi & Na, 2020)

It is recommended that learners should learn languages 24*7 as language learning is a continuous process. Language can be developed rapidly through consistency and persistence. Learners are encouraged to learn a language in the classroom, which is not adequate exposure for learning English. Constant communication and feedback on learning surely enhances learners' confidence and helps learners to improve their English language and communication skills. The tools or media used to learn English language skills determine the learner's engagement. This is possible through blended learning. Significantly, it is only through practice that English language skills are developed and enhanced. Using media such as audio and video clips, videotape, audiotape, or computers with exercises to complete at home or in the language lab with materials, teachers can assist students in improving their English language skills. The target language's vocabulary, grammar, and conversations can all be listened to by students to improve their listening skills. (Aji, 2017) The key to learning a language is the learner's participation and engagement. Numerous surveys were performed to explore the learners' engagement. One of the studies given further discusses the significance of student engagement.

In order to improve pedagogical practices through a BL approach targeted at enhancing linguistic competence, an exploratory action research project was conducted. According to a study by Shohel et al. (2020), adding student voices to BL settings increases student engagement. Additionally, it implies that BL can increase student involvement in the development and redesign of instructional strategies, encouraging active engagement both within and outside of the classroom.

Similarly to this, another study discusses student participation. A cutting-edge teaching method called BL combines traditional classroom instruction with online learning to greatly increase student engagement. (Zhang, 2021)

Subsequently, another study employs mixed methods to assess the satisfaction of four Mathayom Suksa Four Thai students with the blended teaching model. Achievement tests, satisfaction questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews were employed as study tools. The pre-and post-test results indicated that the intervention impacted the learners' performance. The survey's findings revealed that most respondents reported high levels of student satisfaction in all areas, with teaching quality, learning outcomes, and learning experiences rating higher than learning materials, learning context, assessment, and feedback. (Zhou & Chayanuvat, 2021) Indeed, this study is

evidence that using the BL method is outcome-oriented and enhances the learners' experiences.

Besides improving the students' English language or communication skills, BL also played a crucial role in developing the students' 21st-century skills, such as self-directed learning and problem-solving skills. This study showed that BL was an effective teaching approach for teaching and learning English Language skills enhancement and 21st-century skills. (Ramalingam et al., 2021)

Comprehensively, BL fosters the ability to use modern communication tools to learn the English language for academic and professional purposes while having a constrained amount of classroom time. By no means does this method improve the standard of training. (Kirillova et al., 2019)

Notably, the study was conducted at a university in Manila City, Philippines, which uses BL as a strategy for teaching and learning English. The study's results clearly show how positively the students perceived their overall projected language abilities and skill domains, especially vocabulary development. (Álvarez & Corcuera, 2021)

Correspondingly, this additional study aims to learn how teachers and students in an English Fundamentals course at a polytechnic in Hanoi, Vietnam, feel about using BL. The results demonstrated that instructors and students regarded BL. Implementing BL had an impact on the pedagogical approaches used by teachers. Grammar and vocabulary are now taught online for self-study rather than in-person, freeing up additional class time for speaking exercises. Students later admitted that BL had helped them create their own perspective of learning autonomy. (Thi Thao Nguyen et al., 2021)

The findings demonstrated that blended learning, which combines classroom instruction with Moodle, is a handy approach to acquiring today's modern language anytime and anywhere. (Suriaman et al., 2022)

Though the growth in research is visible in the education sector, the BL method can be useful to transfer the content or in other fields too. The graph indicates that BL methods or areas can be explored in sectors to facilitate learning.

The studies about BL that have been done in various parts of the world are shown in the above graph. Studies in this field are expanding rapidly, and many researchers are eager to delve deeper to advance our understanding.

However, it is equally important to notice that each country and each institution has a different level of readiness to deal with the new realities of online education. The issues include curriculum, instructors' expertise, learners' preparation, and innovative accessibility, notably the internet. Even if innovation can level the playing field, there are still wide inequalities in socioeconomic inequality and the digital divide. To give access to opportunities, close gaps, and solve issues with blended learning.

III. POPULATION AND SAMPLE

MIT ADT University first-year students made up the study population. The participants had to be able to use a computer and read English. They were also guaranteed to have encountered learning environments both before and after the pandemic. 50 first-year, first-semester students for the current study via an online survey that was given out during the 2022–2023 academic year. Of these, 40 students replied, and their average age was 20.

IV. RESEARCH DESIGN

Table 1: Research Design

Sr. No.	Research questions	Research Objectives	Null Hypotheses	Alternate Hypotheses	Data Collection
1	What is the perception and attitude of students towards blended learning?	To assess the perception and attitude of students towards blended learning	Students are indifferent towards blended learning	Students have a positive perception and attitude towards blended learning	A ten-question section about perception and attitude towards BL(Section I)
2	Is there any impact of BLOn a student's performance?	To evaluate the impact of BLOn on student performance,	BL has no impact on student performance.	There is a positive impact of BLOn student performance.	A ten-question section measuring impact (Section II)

In order to examine the effects of BL and gauge students' attitudes and perceptions of it, the study used a survey method. A Google Form with 20 multiple-choice questions was used to gather data. The survey was divided into two parts: the first asked about attitudes and perceptions of BL among students, and the second asked about how it affected the learning process. To support the results, the researcher also took observational notes during class sessions in addition to the survey.

Aims

1. To determine whether BL can improve learners' English language skills.
2. To study learners' perceptions and attitudes towards enhancing English language skills in English with a BL approach

Approach

This study uses both primary and secondary sources of data. The literature available and previous studies provide detailed insight into the several challenges associated with the subject. In addition, it attempts to investigate the depth of the problem by finding and analysing primary data.

V. FINDINGS

Cronbach's Alpha for Section I of the questionnaire was 0.94, Section II of the questionnaire was 0.95, and for the entire questionnaire, it was 0.97. The Cronbach Alpha scores were >0.70 , so the questionnaire was considered reliable.

Profile information

6 out of the 40 respondents were Male, 33 were Female, while 1 did not prefer to disclose their gender. 2 out of the 40 respondents were 17 years of age, 25 were 18 years of age, 8 were 19 years of age, 1 was 20 years of age, and 4 were more than 20 years of age. All 40 respondents were from the B.SC. Course. 16 out of the 40 respondents had <1 year of a BL experience, another 16 had an experience of BL for 1-2 years, and 8 had more than 2 years of a BL experience.

Testing of Hypotheses

H₀₁: Learners do not have a positive perception and attitude towards blended learning

H_{a1}: Learners have a positive perception and attitude towards blended learning

To test the hypothesis, responses to Section I of the questionnaire were considered. The summary is given below:

Table 2: Item-wise Percentage of Agreement and Overall Average

Question	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.6	1.7	1.8	1.9	1.10	Average
Agree %	89%	89%	89%	73%	84%	93%	90%	86%	91%	94%	88%

The average agreement for the section was compared with a hypothesised population mean of 50% agreement using a t-test and results were as under

Table 3: One-Sample t-Test Results for Hypothesis Testing

Parameter	Value
Average (H ₀)	88%
Standard Deviation	1.0790
H ₁	50%
n	40
t-statistic	2.223
p-values	0.013

The null hypothesis, which states that students do not have a favorable attitude and perception of blended learning, was rejected because the p-value was less than 0.05 at the 95% confidence level. As a result, the alternative hypothesis was approved, confirming that students have a favorable opinion and attitude regarding blended learning.

Second hypothesis

H₀₂: Learners' performance is not significantly impacted by blended learning.

H_{a2}: Learners' performance is significantly impacted by blended learning.

To test this hypothesis, responses from Section II of the survey were examined. Below is a summary of the results.:

Table 4: Percentage of Agreement for Questionnaire Items 2.1–2.10 (Average = 89%)

Question	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4	2.5	2.6	2.7	2.8	2.9	2.10	Average
Agree %	90%	83%	84%	88%	90%	98%	89%	88%	87%	96%	89%

The average agreement for the section was compared with a hypothesised population mean of 50% agreement using a t-test and results were as under

Table 5: One-Sample t-Test Analysis for Hypothesis Testing (Section II)

Parameter	Value
Average (Ho)	89%
Standard Deviation	1.0560
H1	50%
n	40
t-statistic	2.351
p-values	0.010

As the p-value is <0.05 (at 95% confidence level), the null hypothesis, that there is no significant impact of BL on performance, was rejected in favour of its alternative, that there is a significant impact of BL on performance.

VI. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The learners in the present study were selected from the Bachelor of Psychology programme at the School of Vedic Sciences, MIT ADT University (MITADTU), Pune, India. MITADTU offers English Communication and Holistic Personality courses to all first-year students. The data analysis suggests the scores on all ten question questions in both sections are in a tight range, implying a very consistent outcome.

Students have accorded more or less equal importance to all communication needs: oral, written, reading, listening and special needs. It is important to note that students have shown positive perceptions and attitudes towards learning language through blended learning. This shows the students' willingness and interest in blended learning. The average mean for the impact of BL is also significant. Therefore, BL can potentially affect the teaching and learning process if it is used judiciously by teachers and utilised actively by the learners. Both null hypotheses were rejected in favour of their alternative hypotheses. It implies that learners have experienced learning English through BL valuable and exciting for them. When learners are optimistic about their learning and if they are interested in a particular method, then the method creates an impact on the learning process.

The results of this analysis are quite encouraging. Considerable agreement with all the statements in the range of around 80% shows motivation and attitude towards blended learning. There is enthusiasm and encouragement from faculty and learners. Subjects like the English language that are not front-line or primary subjects usually

fail to attract students. That seems to be happening with the English language in the case of professional course learners. Most learners are negative towards language learning because of fear of the language, and the rest of it comes from the subject getting overshadowed by the mainstream subjects. Learning is strongly influenced by the motivation and attitude of the learner. With motivation missing, nothing much positive can happen.

However, considering earlier exposure to BL and exposure at MIT ADT University, on the one side, some of the learners were enthusiastic towards learning language through BL and on the other side, some learners were ignorant about the method even though they were a part of it for a long time.

The teacher conducted an orientation session for the learners and explained the importance of blended learning. On the realisation of the BL method, learners took part in the study and showed a positive perception towards BL through the survey conducted for the study.

Information investigation and inferential investigation were done to analyse the data. The expressive investigation introduced the profile data of the respondents. The inferential examination utilising different measurable techniques like t-test and p-value leads to a better understanding of the study.

The results show that BL encourages teachers and students to make their learning productive, useful and outcome-based.

VII. KEY FINDINGS

The results demonstrate the adequacy of the method for its implementation in the context of English language teaching. The most significant observation of this study is that learners were interested in learning English through the BL method, which is more adaptive for them and allows them to learn content at their own pace. In accordance with the first question, positive perceptions and attitudes are observed among the learners. They were curious to explore learning opportunities to enhance language proficiency through BL. Learners were provided with some tasks to complete through both offline and online modes. However, researchers acknowledge considerable discussions among learners as to whether the BL method is useful or not for them. However, the extent to which it is channelised is unknown and learners sometimes lose motivation to learn language either offline or online. It is interesting to note that BL has created a positive impact among learners. This study has three important findings: 1. Learners' Roles became crucial and they became the centre of attention in the BL method. 2. Teachers' roles changed drastically in the

implementation of BL method, which led teachers to change their attitudes and perception towards the teaching and learning process. 3. Since these useful methods, management and other stakeholders supported the concept and encouraged the researcher to extrapolate this topic in an extensive way to reach conclusive results and findings.

VIII. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The initial objective of the study was to know the perceptions and attitudes of the learners towards BL in the context of English language skills. The first question addresses the responses the learners received for perception and attitudes.

In general, participants' opinions of BL tools were satisfactory. Three factors are essential to major the positive impact of blended learning; the advantages they experienced, their emotions, and the difficulties they overcame. Each participant in the BL activities with a variety of engaging activities described a satisfying experience. It was hypothesised that participants have positive perceptions and attitudes towards blended learning. Researchers' observations also imply the same level of result with respect to the first questions in the study. This also accords with our earlier observations and studies, which showed that learners are comfortable completing tasks in both online and offline modes. The present results are significant in the major respect that learners were quick in accommodating new tools, technology and web-based activities. These findings will doubtless be much scrutinised, but there are some immediately dependable conclusions for the first question addressed in the study.

The majority of participants indicated satisfaction with their experiences taking part in BL activities in the classroom. Some result-oriented activities helped learners to improve their communication. The participant's perception of the usefulness and accessibility of BL may be the root of the positive experiences they shared. Students are accustomed to using contemporary tools and technology in this digital age, which may boost how simple they appear to be to use.

The second research study was conceptualised to find out how BL impacted undergraduates' English language proficiency based on their own experiences. The analysis indicates that participating actively in various web-based BL activities aided in the participants' improvement of their English language abilities. This result is also supported by earlier studies, which found that English language proficiency was improved using the proposed BL methodology. A large number of participants appeared to share the same views on how BL improved their English. However, there are a number of obstacles to integrating BL in the classroom. One of the participants in the interviews

mentioned that a weak Internet connection was the most typical problem with the adoption of blended learning.

The proportion of respondents, however, decisively agreed that their English language skills were strengthened by the numerous web-based BL activities. This advancement is encouraging because many educators believe it is difficult to help learners build English language competencies. Due to the fact that BL mixes in-person methods with online learning, participants were able to build these skills through participation in assignments, tasks, activities, and competitions. The participants emphasised the advantages of face-to-face interactions and other web-based technologies that assisted them in improving their skills. According to earlier studies, BL has a good effect on improving English language proficiency, particularly in communication. Further studies, which take these variables into account, will certainly help the researchers investigate this area from a multidimensional perspective to understand this method and its usefulness.

IX. CONCLUSIONS

The research endeavoured to analyse students' views and feelings regarding BL and the influence of variations in the strength of the experience were found in terms of learning interest, attitude, and the strategy use of blended learning. The findings of the study, which focused on the developed practical benefits of CLT and the provision of IL skills for EFL learners, blended their improvement with language activities. The study also pointed at the need for positive feelings from the side of the learners and teachers regarding the employment of a BL environment, as well as a favorable attitude in order for it to be successfully applied. But some of the barriers to the implementation of a BL approach in EFL teaching were found in the studies, but should be taken into consideration in further research.

Nevertheless, there are limitations to the present study. As some authors state, "the 'harmonious balance' of 'thoughtful integration'" of face-to-face and online elements is of great importance. As a result, the design of the blended process teaching in this study requires further development and consideration. Also, due to constraints and no accessibility in time, the larger sample couldn't be achieved to measure the reliability and validity of the data.

Online learning must be regarded as a complement, not as a substitute for, face-to-face teaching. Perhaps we can use the current situation to bring together face-to-face learning and educational technology platforms. But, ICT and online education will increasingly influence education in the future, and we cannot deny that. While additional research is certainly required, the current study helps clarify

perceptions of the deployment of Bland and the inevitability of the implementation of blended courses.

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Education as Emancipation: A Subaltern Reading of Yendluri Sudhakar's "An Autobiography"

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Abstract— *This paper examines the emancipatory potential of education in dismantling caste-based oppression through a subaltern reading of Yendluri Sudhakar's poem "An Autobiography." It explores the historical evolution of caste stratification in India and foregrounds the lived realities of Dalit communities whose socio-economic and cultural marginalization has persisted despite constitutional guarantees of equality. While several regressive practices such as sati and child marriage have been legally abolished, caste discrimination continues in both rural and urban spaces, often manifesting in violent practices like honour killings. Through Sudhakar's autobiographical reflections, this paper argues that education becomes a transformative instrument enabling Dalits to reclaim dignity, identity, and intellectual space within mainstream discourse.*



Keywords— *Upper caste, discrimination, Dalits, education, subaltern, memory*

Jean-Jacques Rousseau famously observed that human beings are born free yet everywhere in chains. Though his formulation addressed political inequality, it resonates profoundly with the Indian caste system, which imposes social hierarchies from birth. While theological narratives claim divine creation of humanity as equal, historical processes shaped systems that institutionalized inequality. Among the most rigid of these systems is caste, a stratified social order that determines one's occupation, social status, and access to resources from the moment of birth.

Unlike class distinctions elsewhere, often grounded in economic or ethnic differences, caste in India codifies hereditary privilege and deprivation. Initially rationalized as a division of labour, it evolved into an entrenched structure serving the interests of dominant groups. Those positioned at the bottom of this hierarchy—commonly referred to as "subalterns"—have historically been denied social, economic, and educational rights. The term "subaltern," derived from the Latin *subalternus* ("below" or "inferior"), signifies those relegated to subordinate status. In India, Dalits embody this marginalized category, enduring systematic exclusion and dehumanization for centuries.

Yendluri Sudhakar, a prominent Telugu Dalit writer and academic, emerges as a powerful voice within this context. Rather than yielding to oppression, he pursued education relentlessly and rose to become a professor and Head of the Department at Potti Sri Ramulu Telugu University. His poem "An Autobiography" becomes both personal testimony and collective memory, chronicling generational trauma while celebrating the liberatory power of education.

The caste system's ideological foundation is frequently traced to texts such as the Manusmriti, which perpetuated the myth that Shudras emerged from the feet of Brahma and were destined for servitude. Such narratives justified the relegation of Dalits to menial occupations including manual scavenging and sanitation work. As Susan Bayly observes, caste has historically structured entitlement and disability within Indian society (307). Similarly, Sangeetha Rao questions the textual inconsistencies regarding the number and origin of varnas, thereby exposing the dubious legitimacy of caste hierarchies (50).

Caste discrimination extends beyond occupational segregation to regulate marriage, property ownership, mobility, and even bodily autonomy. Inter-caste marriages often provoke violent reprisals, including honour killings—

acts committed under the pretext of preserving familial "honour." Dalits were denied land ownership and frequently dispossessed of ancestral property. They were reduced to labourers on lands that once belonged to them, experiencing not only economic exploitation but also psychological humiliation.

Sudhakar's poem poignantly juxtaposes his present dignity with his ancestors' degradation. Invited as chief guest to a formal function, he sits among dignitaries on the dais—an image laden with historical irony. His mind travels back to a time when Dalits were prohibited from entering villages and forced to live on the outskirts. The simple act of being offered water evokes memories of upper-caste individuals pouring water from a height, compelling Dalits to drink without physical contact, as if they were animals. Education, he realizes, has reversed this humiliating dynamic.

The ceremonial presentation of a shawl triggers another painful recollection. Dalit women were once denied the right to cover their upper bodies, subjected to public shaming and sexual exploitation. Sudhakar recalls, "The vague figure of my blouseless / Grandmother cuts my heart." Dalit women bore the dual burden of caste and gender oppression. As Devasahyam argues, they carry a "double cross"—subjugated both as Dalits and as women (157). Sexual violence against Dalit women often went unpunished, as perpetrators exploited caste privilege to evade justice.

Sudhakar also remembers restrictions on clothing and footwear. Dalits were forced to remove sandals when passing upper-caste streets and sometimes required to carry them in hand. The line "Clay feet of my shoeless great grandfathers" encapsulates the relentless toil of ancestors who laboured barefoot under harsh conditions for meagre sustenance. They were denied access to temples, common roads, and burial grounds, reinforcing spatial segregation as a mechanism of control.

Food, another marker of dignity, becomes a symbol of humiliation. Dalits were given leftovers, often thrown on the ground. Eating sand-mixed food became a matter of survival. These recollections underscore the extent of social exclusion practiced in a nation that now constitutionally guarantees equality.

Education, however, disrupts this continuum of degradation. Sudhakar's ascent into academia illustrates its transformative power. Though he faced discrimination even within educational institutions—teachers despising him due to caste identity—he persisted. Walter Fernandes notes that Dalits' resistance to dehumanization provokes reaction from vested interests, yet it also signifies emerging identity and

assertion (3). Education empowers Dalits to articulate their experiences and claim intellectual authority.

Dalit literature thus emerges as literature of protest and reclamation. Autobiography becomes a potent medium, enabling writers to document lived realities previously silenced. Kancha Ilaiah asserts that Dalit literature alone can challenge the "hinduised" and "sanskritised" canon of Indian literature. Sudhakar's poem aligns with this tradition, contesting dominant narratives and demanding recognition.

Non-Dalit writers have also addressed caste injustice. Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* exposes systemic humiliation through the character of Bakha and the molestation of Sohini. Similarly, Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* portrays racial injustice through Tom Robinson's wrongful conviction. Though contexts differ, both works parallel Dalit oppression in their depiction of structural inequality and denial of justice.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaims equality and inherent dignity for all human beings. Yet, caste discrimination persists as a social reality. Sudhakar's poem affirms that education serves as a catalyst for dismantling entrenched prejudice. By situating himself on the dais—once an inaccessible space—he symbolizes generational transformation.

Dalit writers today challenge literary marginalization, though publishing industries historically privileged upper-caste voices. Their assertion reflects a broader social movement toward equality. Education does not merely confer degrees; it restores agency, reconstructs identity, and reclaims humanity.

Yendluri Sudhakar's "An Autobiography" stands as a testament to the emancipatory force of education. Through personal memory and collective history, the poem exposes the brutality of caste oppression while celebrating intellectual empowerment. Caste remains a malignant social reality, but education offers a path toward dismantling its ideological foundations. Sudhakar's narrative ultimately affirms that liberation begins with awareness, articulation, and academic empowerment.

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Patriarchy and Gendered Subalternity in Mahesh Dattani's *Where There's a Will*

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Abstract— This paper explores the representation of patriarchy and gender in *Where There's a Will*, analyzing how Dattani uses character dynamics, narrative structure, and dialogue to criticize traditional gender roles and inheritance practices. It also considers the broader socio-cultural implications of the play, situating it within the context of feminist and postcolonial discourses in Indian English literature. It is a poignant dramatization of patriarchy and gender in an Indian family setting. Through its dark humour and restrained dialogue, the play vividly portrays how patriarchal structures suppress women's voices and autonomy even after death. Hasmukh Mehta, the patriarch, whose power controls every member of his family because of his will, is at the heart of the play. Using the narrative technique, Dattani demonstrates how patriarchy transcends physical presence.



Keywords— Patriarchy, subaltern, feminism, gendered.

One of India's most well-known English-language playwrights, Mahesh Dattani, is renowned for his sharp criticism of cultural customs and social conventions. His dramas are promiscuous due to their concern for the marginalized sections of the society. He is an upholder of the subalterns, especially the gendered subalterns. Anita Myles writes, "All the plays of Mahesh Dattani are rooted in realism focusing attention on subalterns, which are the neglected groups of society who are ostracized, exploited and suppressed."¹ The play *Where There's a Will* (2003) is a powerful critique of the patriarchal structures that still rule Indian homes, particularly when it comes to inheritance and property. The play focuses on the fallout from the death of a family patriarch, whose will serves as the impetus for the disclosure of long-standing conflicts, secrets, and family hierarchies. Dattani challenges the ways in which patriarchal ideologies are upheld through the generations, frequently at the price of women's independence and self-respect in this story.

During the post-colonial times, the subaltern studies group have come up with the interdisciplinary methods to investigate and analyze the consciousness and voice of subaltern social categories such as dalits, religious

minorities, farmers, tribals and women. This group has tried to focus on the isolated study of subaltern people and their structural exploitation. In the book *In Other Worlds* (1987), Gayatri Spivak has explored the gendered subaltern as the subject for history and literature. She tried to liberate the subject of subalternity from the restricted domains of history to include alternative narratives and subalternity of Third World women. Translating the two short stories of Mahasweta Devi -*Draupadi* and *Breast-Giver*, she tried to trace the lives of subaltern women who are marginalized and oppressed by several power hierarchies simultaneously. She pointed out that the condition of women is more miserable as a subaltern because they are governed by multiple factors such as race, class and caste. Women are doubly marginalized and so it is important to locate women as subaltern in the context of subaltern studies. Feminism serves as another possible criterion for locating the subaltern. The woman from this perspective emerges as the gendered subaltern who is subjected to different levels of oppression based on her gender as well as her class and caste. In this way, woman is a gendered subaltern who is doubly marginalized. Mahesh Dattani has tried to find out

the subaltern based on gender in her different plays. Gargi Talapatra writes,

"In the context of Subaltern Studies, feminism serves as another possible criterion of locating the subaltern. The woman, from this perspective, emerges as the 'gendered subaltern' who is subjected to different levels of oppression based on her gender as well as her class and caste. Within the larger matrix of her existence, she is constructed as an individual belonging to the 'Second Sex', and hence is dominated by patriarchal norms. However, simultaneously, she is also the recipient of oppression based on her caste, class, race and such multiple layers of hierarchies. Moreover, within her own community or class, she is further dominated by the patriarchal order of her immediate society. Therefore, the woman, as the gendered subaltern, is doubly marginalized. She is rendered voiceless by such diverse parameters of subjugation."²

The phrase "gendered subaltern" describes people, mostly women, who are silenced and socially, politically, and economically marginalized not only because of their gender but also because of their subordinate status in a colonial or postcolonial setting. This idea, which is essential to feminist and post-colonial studies, emphasizes how women experience even more oppression within already disadvantaged groups, making them the most marginalized and silent members of society. The postcolonial writer Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak was a significant theorist of the concept, questioning their capacity to be heard in her landmark article "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

Where There's a Will highlights the systemic injustices that still keep women at the margins by depicting gender roles, property rights, and family dynamics in a nuanced manner. It also presents a vision of resistance and change, implying that it is both necessary and feasible to overthrow patriarchal system. It is a biting satire that dissects the insidious role of patriarchy, revealing its pervasive influence on individual lives, family dynamics, and the very concept of identity. A compelling examination of gender and patriarchy in modern Indian society can be found in this play. Mukesh Ranjan Verma writes, "In *Where There's a Will*, Dattani exposes the hollowness of the patriarchal code. The play presents the story of a successful industrialist, Hasmukh Mehta, who tries to dictate his son's life through his will after his death."³

The struggle over inheritance and property, which is central to *Where There's a Will*, is a metaphor for the larger patriarchal control over women's lives. The patriarch Hasmukh Mehta's passing away starts a series of events that reveal the brittleness of family ties and the pervasive gender inequality in the family unit. Hasmukh Mehta is the head of his family. He controls his family as long as he lives. Even

after his death, he continues his authority in the form of his will. His will, a meticulously crafted document designed to control his wife, Sonal, and son, Ajit, is the ultimate manifestation of his desire for absolute control. Hasmukh embodies the traditional Indian patriarch: domineering, financially controlling, emotionally distant, and deeply invested in maintaining his legacy and lineage through his male heir. Every family member is irritated by his 'bossy nature'. (Dattani, 509) His constant surveillance and commentary, audible only to the audience, highlight the internalized nature of patriarchal oppression, where the deceased patriarch's voice continues to dictate the living's choices. Through the spectral presence of Hasmukh Mehta and the evolving dynamics of his family, Dattani exposes how patriarchal norms dictate inheritance, control female agency, and stifle individual freedom. Kiran asserts that Hasmukh was "intoxicated with his power" and "thought he was invincible. That he could rule from his grave by making this will." (Dattani, 508)

Hasmukh cannot accept his wife as his equal because of his domineering nature. His overruling spirit suppresses Sonal. Sonal is only regarded as a natural aspect of existence. She is not recognized as Hasmukh's mate. Hasmukh constantly criticizes her, her opinions, and the manner she raised Ajit. Hasmukh's marriage to Sonal was not a happy occasion in his life. He thought of it as the most sad period of his life. His marriage served simply to satisfy his lust. Two souls and two lifestyles were not united because he believed he was powerful enough to do anything he wanted. Hasmukh began cheating his wife and gratifying himself outside the house. Only Hasmukh's masculine ego and financial dominance lead him to form an extramarital affair with Kiran Jhaveri. It indicates that he is a completely shameless individual who lacks morality and respect for his marriage. He is not deserving of our pity because he betrays the trust. Marriage becomes intolerable and difficult when one loses trust in married life. Life simply turns into a series of arguments and fights as the husband and wife accuse and suspect each other. Hasmukh and Sonal's lives are devoid of all harmony and love.

Man's economic independence and freedom can lead to such family dissolution is evident in this drama. Sonal Mehta is portrayed as a traditional, submissive Indian wife who has assimilated patriarchal norms. She is unable to do anything since she is a woman and does not wish to diminish herself. She also lacks independence and financial freedom. Her passivity is a direct result of a long, loveless, and unfulfilling marriage. She is often ignored and belittled by her husband, who complains about her lack of passion and finds her "good for nothing". She is a docile, subservient woman whose place in the household is limited to the kitchen. Sonal's "hearth" is her kitchen, where she

spends the most of her time preparing "parathas" or "halwa with an orange flavour." Since she has nowhere else to express her annoyance and irritation, the kitchen becomes her haven. It is therefore not at all strange that she overindulges in the kitchen when she maintains that a proper meal requires more than just navrathan pulao, malai kofta, baingan barta, patties, and not to mention halwa and salad.

Sonal Mehta was governed not only by her husband, Hasmukh, but also by her sister, Minal who always decided what she should wear and what game she should play. She is devoid of taking decisions of her life. It is most ironical that a woman is governing another woman's life. Mahesh Dattani's portrayal of the tradition-bound woman is unique in that she is simply a passive figure bound by custom. Sonal's metamorphosis stems from Hasmukh's death and the aftermath, which highlights her childhood passivity. Sonal realizes she has been oppressed and dominated not only by her husband, but also by her sister, Minal. Her sister continues to limit her life and she lacks the strength to break away. Sonal has always blindly followed Minal's decisions.

Preeti, the daughter-in-law of Hasmukh, was also oppressed under the dominant control of her father-in-law. She expresses her anger only after the death of Hasmukh, "What did he do? He! He was a slave driver, your father! He almost drove me mad with his bossy nature. He succeeded with your mother. But I didn't let him do that to me. How did I manage? Simple. I gave in, I simply listened to him and did not 'protest' like you!" (Dattani, 501) Preeti adopted another form of protest that was silent and murderous. She planned to change his pills to kill her father-in-law. She had no voice. She did not resist. She became fatal and criminal to get relief.

Very much like the earlier plays of the Dattani, *Bravely Fought the Queen* and *Tara* etc, *Where There's a Will* concerns the formidable aspect of the old patriarchal code and resulting impact upon the complicated modern urban life. Kiran Jhaveri, Hasmukh's mistress and the executor of his will, is an intelligent, astute, and pragmatic marketing executive who, in Hasmukh's view, is the only person competent enough to manage his estate. Hasmukh entrusts her with the power to control his family after his death. Kiran initially seems to be a willing participant in Hasmukh's posthumous control, but she ultimately becomes a catalyst for the family's liberation. She bonds with Sonal and helps the family members realize their own worth and break free from Hasmukh's long-held tyranny. Kiran herself had a difficult past. Having been a victim of domestic violence, she took on the role of Hasmukh's mistress partly for financial security.

It is ironical that apart from the female characters like Sonal, Preeti and Kiran, a male character is also groaning under the burden of patriarchy. Ajit is another victim of patriarchal power of his father. We feel the burden of control in the dialogues of Ajit. Hasmukh Mehta had been an obedient son of his father and he expected the same on the part of his son. The absence of obedience in his son causes depression in him. His behaviour towards his son becomes rude. As a conventional father, he knows what is best for his son. The first half of the play presents the father's point of view. He regards Ajit as an incapable and irresponsible young man of twenty three. Ajit, on his part, considers his father to be a head strong person who is just not ready to consider any others' opinion except his own. Ajit tries to defy his father in the conversation. In a patriarchal system, the father acts more or less in despotic manner. In his eyes, the son never grows up; he thinks that his experiences are better than his son's. This is what happens in the play also. Hasmukh is unhappy with his son Ajit because he is not following the footsteps of his father. The father wants a typical submissive, hard working, obedient son; he does not accept an imaginative, individualistic and independent son. On the other hand, the son is not ready to be a prototype of his father. Ajit wants to be independent in the business, but his father refuses to invest in his new business ventures, thought upon by him. The patriarchy is so much dominant that it does not allow others to prosper and take new steps. In one of his dialogues, Ajit confesses that since his childhood, he had been governed and dominated by his father for doing things; he was not allowed to do according to his own will. And even after his death, his father is governing his life. Kiran Jhaveri explains the reason behind the domineering nature of his father and reveals the truth. This is the condition of the post-colonial Indian society where the patriarchal code has become rigorous to an extent of destroying the family structure and healthy family atmosphere. Hasmukh as a patriarch considers himself to be the most experienced and eligible member. He does not allow space to others, whether they are women or male members of the family. His authoritative, dominant role makes the life of other members unbearable and suffocating. That's why, all of them want to break free of this patriarchal code. According to Mahesh Dattani, the real danger of patriarchal code is for the proper growth of individuals. As Mukesh Ranjan Verma writes,

"For Dattani, the real danger of the patriarchal code lies in denying an individual the opportunity for an independent growth. In the name of tradition and good manners and even duty, the son is expected to follow blindly, whatever, he is asked to do. This will deprive a man of his drive and initiative. Dattani calls the men who demand this kind of

obedience as “weak men with false strength”. He also condemns those who submit to this type of subjugation.”⁴

The will in the play functions not merely as a legal document but as a symbol of patriarchal control that extends beyond death. Hasmukh, though deceased, continues to exert influence over his family through the terms of his will, which reflects his biases and reinforces gender hierarchies. Mahesh Dattani's projection of Hasmukh's ghost wandering through the house and commenting upon the characters' dialogues and actions symbolically projects the lingering of the patriarchal code even after the death of the patriarch. This posthumous control underscores the enduring nature of patriarchal authority, which transcends individual lifespans and is institutionalized through cultural and legal systems. Dattani also critiques the performative nature of the will-reading, which resembles a ritual or ceremony. This ritualization reinforces the legitimacy of patriarchal decisions, even when they are unjust, and highlights the ways in which tradition is used to justify inequality. The play not only unravels the clash of two generations, but it also points out to the disastrous impact upon the coming generation whose future prospects are under threat.

In the nutshell, *Where There's a Will* is a powerful play of Mahesh Dattani which successfully projects the gendered subalternity of Sonal, Preeti and Kiran who are victimized by the power structure of the society where male agents exert their will upon women and women are helpless, silent and submissive. It unfolds the everlasting impact of patriarchy upon our society and the miserable plight of women. All the characters are victimized by patriarchy whether male or female. Each character reacts to patriarchal power of Hasmukh Mehta in his own way. Ajit chooses the way of protest through his verbal attacks, while Sonal chooses to remain silent and be subservient to her master. Preeti does not surrender herself to the dominating father-in-law and plans to murder him in order to get rid of his power. In the beginning of the play, the women are depicted as passive subalterns who cannot speak, whereas in the later part of the play, they become vocal and independent. In the company of Kiran, Sonal realizes her mistake that she should have learnt to be independent and self confident. She also realizes the shadow of her sister, Minal, who did not allow her to think and act independently. As long as the patriarchy will govern the lives of women, the women will remain handicapped, indecisive and puppets in the hand of male agents of the family. To redeem the situation, it is desirable to allot freedom in decision making so that they can become active agent in the development of nation.

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Oi! Music as Resistance: Youth Subcultures in Griffiths' Post-War Drama

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Abstract— Trevor Griffiths (b. 1935), a key figure in British political theatre from a Northern working-class milieu, leveraged drama to advance leftist causes, educate audiences, and challenge capitalist structures. Influenced by the 1968 upheavals alongside peers like David Hare, Howard Brenton, David Edgar, and John McGrath, Griffiths spanned genres including stage, television, film, and radio. His 1982 play *Oi for England*, premiered at the Royal Court Theatre, dissects the rise of working-class youth subcultures—specifically skinheads—in post-war Britain. It portrays their dual role as resisters to dominant culture and unwitting victims of fascist exploitation amid 1980s socio-economic crises. This expanded analysis elucidates Griffiths' nuanced depiction of youth counter-culture, ideological fractures within skinhead groups, the instrumentalization of "Oi!" music, and the pervasive politics of racism under Thatcherism. By weaving historical context with dramatic technique, the paper argues that Griffiths employs theatre as a diagnostic tool for class struggle and cultural resistance.



Keywords— Youth culture, skinheads, post-war Britain, Trevor Griffiths, Thatcherism, Oi music, political theatre.

I. INTRODUCTION

Trevor Griffiths emerged as a formidable voice in British political drama, rooted in his working-class origins in Manchester and affiliation with the Labour Party's left wing. As editor of *Northern Voice*, he honed his activist sensibilities, using theatre to "politicize, educate, and liberate" the proletariat—a mission intensified by the global protests of 1968. Unlike contemporaries who occasionally veered toward abstraction, Griffiths grounded his work in material realities, making screens and stages battlegrounds for socialist discourse.

Oi for England (1982) stands out for its urgent intervention into 1980s youth culture. Set against the backdrop of Moss Side riots, the play follows five unemployed skinhead musicians—Landry, Swells, Finn (the ideological core), Gloria, and the impulsive Napper—in a derelict Victorian cellar littered with looted goods, posters, and punk ephemera. Police sirens and urban violence frame their rehearsals, underscoring the offstage tumult of Thatcherite Britain. Griffiths shifts from overt

class narratives in plays like *Occupations* or *Comedians* to the micro-politics of subcultural identity, probing how youth navigate resistance and co-optation.

Post-war youth culture crystallized as a "striking and visible manifestation of social change," per Stuart Hall et al., drawing official scrutiny through reports, laws, and interventions (*Resistance Through Rituals* 9). Skinheads, originating in late-1960s East London among second-generation immigrants and white working-class youth, symbolized this shift. Their aesthetic—shaved heads, braces, steel-toed boots, tattoos—paired with "Oi!" music rejected middle-class norms, channeling frustration into aggression. Yet, as Griffiths reveals, this rebellion harbored vulnerabilities to far-right recruitment. This paper expands on these dynamics, historicizing subcultures, analyzing dramatic mechanisms, and evaluating Griffiths' critique of cultural politics.

II. HISTORICAL CONTEXT: POST-WAR YOUTH AND THATCHERISM

The genesis of distinct youth cultures traces to post-1945 Britain, where affluence, full employment, and the 1944 Education Act expanded leisure and schooling, fostering generational autonomy. Mass media—television, rock 'n' roll—amplified this, enabling "mindless imitation" of American styles, as Clarke et al. critique (19). By the 1970s, economic reversals shattered this idyll: oil crises, deindustrialization, and monetarism under Thatcher spiked unemployment to over 3 million by 1982, surpassing 1930s peaks.

Thatcherism exacerbated class divides, with 1981 riots in Brixton, Toxteth, and Moss Side erupting from poverty, police brutality, and racial tensions. Skinheads, once mod offshoots embracing reggae and soul, splintered in the late 1970s: "Oi!" punk revived them as overtly white, working-class warriors. Bands like Sham 69 and Cockney Rejects fused anthems of alienation—"If the Kids Are United"—with street violence. Politically, this vacuum invited extremists: the National Front (NF) and British Movement (BM) courted skinheads, framing immigrants as job-thieves, echoing Enoch Powell's "rivers of blood" rhetoric.

Hall's 1979 *The Great Moving Right Show* diagnoses this as capitalism's "Fascist disguise," where economic despair manifests as racial scapegoating (14). Eric Hobsbawm similarly laments Labour's "forward march halted," noting working-class fragmentation (*Marxism Today*, 1978). Griffiths, writing amid these riots, captures this zeitgeist: *Oi for England* premiered months after Moss Side unrest, using verbatim-inspired dialogue to mirror real skinhead debates on pub walls and zines.

III. DRAMATIC STRUCTURE AND CHARACTERS

Griffiths structures *Oi for England* as a pressure-cooker rehearsal play, confining action to the cellar for claustrophobic intensity. It opens with an explosive "Oi!" chant—"In England's green and pleasant land... Oi, oi, turn the screw" (3)—evoking Blakean irony against urban decay. Songs recur as Brechtian interruptions, blending punk fury ("Black and White, Unite!") with anti-fascist warnings ("The Nazis are coming... Adolf didn't do it, it's all a packer lies") (15). Music politicizes the mundane, transforming amps and drums into weapons of class war.

Characters embody ideological spectra. Finn, the reflective Irish-descended leader, interrogates motives: "I am English and [I] does not wear a swastika for nobody" (8). His skepticism peaks when Napper reveals "the Man"—

a slick American promoter offering a Platt Fields gig ahead of elections. Swells mocks Finn's heritage ("fuckin' Irish"), exposing intra-group racism, while Gloria evolves into a fierce anti-fascist, donning gladiatorial gear. Napper, unemployment's poster child, bites the bait, boasting British pride against "outsiders grabbing opportunities." Landry and Swells waver, highlighting collective vulnerability.

This ensemble mirrors real skinhead factions: anti-racist "SHARP" (Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice) versus NF boneheads. Griffiths avoids caricature, granting even Napper pathos—his rent money from the Man underscores desperation.

IV. POLITICS OF MUSIC AND FASCIST MANIPULATION

Central to the play is music's dual edge: empowerment and exploitation. Bull astutely notes it teeters "on this knife-edge" between commentary and commodity (203). "Oi!"—cockney slang for aggressive hailing—democratized punk for illiterates, tackling unemployment and worker ills. Yet, the Man retools it for fascism, dubbing the band "White Ammunition" for a rally. Finn unmasks this: "against not to fight against our own" (15), prioritizing class solidarity over race.

The gig revelation fractures the group. Napper defends the Man as savior; Finn cites his grandfather's Holocaust horrors—"huge bodies... if you are not a human, what are yer?" "A Nazi" (22). Departures leave Finn and Gloria armored, invoking Batman as proletarian vigilantes. Finn's speechless rampage—demolishing gear—crescendos into a final song: "I wish the Queen would call home her army / From the West Indies, Americay and Spain" (23), indicting imperialism's legacies.

Griffiths draws from *Comedians*, where Price's fury shatters illusions, symbolizing futile rage without direction. Here, open-endedness critiques passive rebellion, urging organized anti-fascism.

V. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SUBCULTURES AND RESISTANCE

Hall and Jefferson's anthology frames skinheads as "resistance through rituals," stylistic exaggerations of working-class values against parent culture (*Resistance Through Rituals*). Yet Griffiths complicates this: subcultures "magically resolve" contradictions but invite recuperation, as Dick Hebdige argues in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (influencing Hall). Skinhead style—boots as "semiotic guerrilla warfare"—protests deindustrialization but gets hijacked by NF propaganda.

Thatcherism accelerated this via enterprise culture, commodifying rebellion (e.g., skinhead fashion in high street stores). Griffiths anticipates Paul Gilroy's *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (1987), linking racism to nationalism's revival amid decline. The Man's U.S. ties evoke cultural imperialism, exporting fascism via music industry pipelines.

Feminist undertones emerge in Gloria's arc—from backing singer to warrior—challenging male-dominated Oi scenes, aligning with socialist feminism in Griffiths' oeuvre.

VI. CONCLUSION

Oi for England endures as a prescient dissection of youth culture's paradoxes: a crucible for resistance yet ripe for fascist harvest. Griffiths masterfully fuses verbatim aesthetics, music, and dialectics to diagnose Thatcherism's cultural fallout, echoing Hobsbawm's halted march. In today's resurgence of populism and gig-economy precarity, the play warns of subcultures' fragility without class consciousness. Future scholarship might extend to digital Oi revivals or global skinhead analogues, affirming theatre's enduring radical potential.

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Consciousness, Character, and Curriculum: The Cross-Disciplinary Imperative of Sri Aurobindo's Educational Thought

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Abstract— This paper re-evaluates the pedagogical urgency of integrating the educational philosophy of Sri Aurobindo into contemporary academic systems across disciplines. In an era characterized by disciplinary fragmentation, utilitarian curricula, and an instrumental conception of knowledge, Sri Aurobindo's *Integral Education* offers a philosophically coherent and ethically grounded alternative. Rooted in a multidimensional anthropology encompassing the physical, vital, mental, psychic, and spiritual planes, his thought reconceives curriculum as the progressive evolution of consciousness rather than mere cognitive or vocational training. Education, in this framework, becomes an integrative process that harmonizes intellectual development with inner growth and character formation. The paper argues that selected writings—particularly *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, and his essays on education—should be integrated into foundational curricula across disciplines, not as doctrinal imposition but as intellectual necessity. These works articulate a unifying epistemic vision capable of bridging the sciences, humanities, and professional studies by situating knowledge within ethical responsibility, self-mastery, and collective evolution. By foregrounding consciousness as the ground of inquiry and character as the aim of education, Sri Aurobindo advances a cross-disciplinary paradigm that addresses value-neutral technocracy and the alienation of learning from lived experience. Compulsory engagement with his core texts, the paper concludes, can cultivate integrative thinking and transformative learning essential for sustaining both academic excellence and civilizational balance in the twenty-first century.



Keywords— *Integral Education; Evolution of Consciousness; Character Formation; Curriculum Reform; Transdisciplinary Pedagogy.*

Theoretical Foundations: Ontology of Consciousness and Integral Anthropology

The metaphysical architecture of Sri Aurobindo's educational philosophy is inseparable from his ontology of consciousness and his integral anthropology. In deliberate contrast to modern materialist epistemologies that treat consciousness as an epiphenomenon of neural complexity, Sri Aurobindo posits consciousness as the ontological ground of existence itself. In *The Life Divine*, he writes that "Consciousness is the fundamental thing in existence" and that what we call Matter is "a form of involved Consciousness" (Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*). Reality,

therefore, is not a bifurcated order divided between mind and matter but a dynamic manifestation of Sat-Chit-Ananda—Existence, Consciousness-Force, and Bliss—whose involution and evolution structure cosmic becoming. This metaphysical reversal dissolves Cartesian dualism and redefines knowledge as a mode of participation in being. Knowing is not external representation but progressive unveiling; the knower grows by recovering the deeper strata of consciousness latent within.

Such an ontology grounds Sri Aurobindo's integral anthropology. Human nature, he argues, is stratified yet unified: the physical body, the vital energies of desire and

emotion, the mental faculty of reason, the psychic being as the soul's evolving principle, and the spiritual consciousness that exceeds individuality. In *The Synthesis of Yoga*, he emphasizes that the psychic entity "is the flame of the Divine within us" guiding evolution toward higher realizations (Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*). This fivefold schema prevents the reduction of education to intellectualism. If the human being is multidimensional, education must address all planes. Intellectual cultivation alone produces imbalance; authentic growth requires harmonization of bodily discipline, emotional purification, rational clarity, psychic awakening, and spiritual widening.

Critics have recognized the philosophical depth of this anthropology. K. D. Sethna observes that Sri Aurobindo's system "restores metaphysics to experiential immediacy," insisting that consciousness is not abstraction but lived reality. Similarly, R. Y. Deshpande argues that Sri Aurobindo's evolutionary vision offers "a comprehensive spiritual humanism" capable of reconciling science and spirituality within a single teleological arc. Even Haridas Chaudhuri, interpreting Integral Yoga in global philosophical contexts, affirms that its anthropology provides "a multidimensional model of personality" absent in reductionist educational theories. These assessments reinforce the claim that Sri Aurobindo's framework is not sectarian mysticism but a systematic metaphysical proposal with pedagogical implications.

The epistemological consequences of this ontology are far-reaching. If consciousness underlies all forms of existence, then disciplinary divisions represent methodological distinctions rather than ontological separations. Physics explores patterns of materialized consciousness; literature articulates its imaginative resonances; social sciences examine its collective formations. In *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo critiques the intellect as a necessary yet limited instrument, warning that reason "cuts the reality into pieces" unless illumined by higher faculties (Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*). Integral knowledge thus demands the cultivation of intuition, ethical awareness, and inward poise alongside analytical skill. Education becomes a process of enlarging consciousness rather than merely refining technique.

His educational essays translate these metaphysical commitments into pedagogical doctrine. In *The Human Cycle*, he situates schooling within the evolutionary advance of society from conventional to subjective and eventually spiritual stages (Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*). Education must therefore anticipate humanity's future rather than replicate its present limitations. In *On Education*, he famously declares that "nothing can be taught," for the teacher is "a helper and a guide" whose task

is to awaken the student's inner faculties (Aurobindo, *On Education*). This statement encapsulates his epistemology: growth proceeds from within; instruction facilitates rather than imposes.

When situated within this ontological and anthropological matrix, Integral Education emerges as philosophical necessity rather than pedagogical innovation. If reality is a gradation of evolving consciousness, then education is the conscious acceleration of that evolution in the individual. The body must be disciplined, the vital purified, the mind clarified, the psychic unveiled, and the spirit realized. Curriculum thereby becomes an architecture of consciousness-development. The indispensability of Sri Aurobindo's thought in educational discourse lies in its provision of a coherent metaphysical foundation that unifies knowledge, character, and consciousness into a single teleological enterprise—an enterprise that seeks not merely skilled professionals but integral human beings.

Critique of Fragmented Modern Education: Specialization, Instrumentalism, and Value-Neutrality:

The contemporary crisis of education—marked by extreme specialization, utilitarian instrumentalism, and the doctrine of value-neutrality—may be read as the culmination of a long epistemic shift in Western modernity. Sri Aurobindo diagnosed this condition not merely as an institutional malfunction but as a deformation of consciousness. In *The Human Cycle*, he cautions that a civilization governed exclusively by rational individualism risks becoming "a huge mechanical organization" in which the soul-principle is subordinated to systemic efficiency (Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle* 47). Such mechanization parallels his critique in *The Life Divine* of the analytic intellect that "cuts the reality into pieces and regards each piece as if it were the whole" (Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* 137). The danger lies not in analysis per se but in mistaking partial truths for integral knowledge.

This fragmentation finds sociological articulation in Max Weber's seminal lecture "Science as a Vocation," where he famously describes modern rationalization as producing an "iron cage" (Weber 181). Weber maintains that empirical science can clarify means but remains silent on ultimate ends, insisting that it cannot answer the question, "What shall we do and how shall we live?" (Weber 147). The claim to value-neutrality, though methodologically defensible, engenders existential disorientation. Sri Aurobindo's response differs fundamentally: for him, knowledge is never metaphysically neutral because consciousness itself is purposive and evolutionary. In *The Synthesis of Yoga*, he affirms that "All knowledge is a seeking after the Divine" (Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga* 27), thereby situating inquiry within a teleological horizon.

Instrumentalism further narrows the scope of education. Herbert Marcuse contends in *One-Dimensional Man* that technological rationality reduces thought to operational control, producing a society in which “the range of thought and behavior is confined within the limits of the established universe of discourse” (Marcuse 12). Education shaped by such rationality privileges technical competence over critical transcendence. Sri Aurobindo anticipates this predicament when he writes that modern systems tend to train “the surface mind” while neglecting “the deeper and inner faculties” (Aurobindo, *On Education* 15). The result is an asymmetrical development in which cognitive skills expand but ethical and spiritual insight atrophy.

A parallel critique emerges in Paulo Freire's rejection of the “banking concept of education,” wherein knowledge is “a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing” (Freire 72). Such pedagogy objectifies learners and reinforces passive adaptation. Sri Aurobindo's dictum that “nothing can be taught” because the teacher is merely “a helper and a guide” (Aurobindo, *On Education* 3) similarly repudiates authoritarian transmission, though he grounds his position not only in political emancipation but in a psychology of inner growth.

The erosion of value-oriented education has also been lamented by Martha Nussbaum, who argues that systems driven primarily by economic growth neglect the cultivation of “the capacity for critical examination of oneself” essential to democratic citizenship (Nussbaum 25). Yet while Nussbaum advocates the humanities as corrective, Sri Aurobindo's critique penetrates further, contending that even humanistic disciplines must be integrated into a wider evolution of consciousness. In *The Life Divine*, he insists that reason is “a mediator” rather than “the sovereign light” (Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* 641). Without higher illumination, intellect remains partial.

Thus, the fragmentation of modern education reflects an ontological oversight: the severance of knowledge from consciousness-development. Specialization becomes isolation; instrumentalism becomes reduction; neutrality becomes indifference. Sri Aurobindo's integrative framework does not reject science or professional training but recontextualizes them within a larger teleology of human evolution. Education must cultivate the physical, vital, mental, psychic, and spiritual dimensions in harmonious balance. Only such integral development can transcend the “iron cage” of rationalization and restore education to its formative vocation as the conscious unfolding of the human being.

Consciousness, Character, and Curriculum: Reframing Educational Purpose:

The question of educational purpose acquires renewed urgency when examined through the philosophical framework of Sri Aurobindo, particularly in the context of Indian higher education. At a time when universities increasingly align themselves with global rankings, employability indices, and technocratic outputs, Sri Aurobindo's conception of education reorients the entire discourse from productivity to consciousness. In *On Education*, he famously asserts that “The first principle of true teaching is that nothing can be taught” because the teacher is “not an instructor or task-master, he is a helper and a guide” (Aurobindo, *On Education* 3). This pedagogical maxim presupposes a psychology in which knowledge unfolds from within; education is not external imposition but interior awakening.

Such awakening is inseparable from character formation. In *The Human Cycle*, Sri Aurobindo contends that the future of civilization depends upon a shift from merely rational organization to “a subjective age” in which inner development becomes primary (Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle* 187). Character, in this schema, is not moralistic conformity but the integration of the physical, vital, mental, psychic, and spiritual planes of being. The psychic being, described in *The Synthesis of Yoga* as “the inmost soul” that “supports the whole nature” (Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga* 823), serves as the evolutionary guide. Education that neglects this interior dimension risks producing technically competent yet spiritually fragmented individuals.

The implications for curriculum design are profound. In *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo warns that reason alone “is not the highest or the sole instrument of knowledge” and must be exceeded by a more integral consciousness (Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* 641). Contemporary Indian higher education, shaped by colonial legacies and neoliberal reforms, often privileges analytic specialization and measurable outcomes. While such rigor is indispensable, its absolutization results in compartmentalization. Sri Aurobindo's integral approach instead envisions curriculum as an architecture of consciousness-development, harmonizing scientific inquiry with ethical cultivation and spiritual reflection.

Comparative global thought underscores this reorientation. John Henry Newman, in *The Idea of a University*, maintains that education aims at “the cultivation of the intellect” and the formation of a “philosophical habit of mind” rather than immediate utility (Newman 99). Yet Newman's emphasis remains largely intellectual. Sri Aurobindo extends the aim beyond intellectual cultivation toward integral transformation. Similarly, Rabindranath Tagore insists in

Personality that education must enable the realization of “the complete man” (Tagore 112), a view consonant with Sri Aurobindo's holistic anthropology. Both thinkers critique colonial pedagogies that sever learners from cultural and spiritual roots.

Modern critiques of higher education echo these concerns. Martha Nussbaum argues that systems driven by economic growth risk producing “useful machines” rather than reflective citizens (Nussbaum 2). Paulo Freire similarly condemns models that reduce students to passive recipients, describing the “banking concept of education” in which learners are treated as containers to be filled (Freire 72). Sri Aurobindo's pedagogical dictum that “the mind has to be consulted in its own growth” (Aurobindo, *On Education* 5) anticipates Freire's dialogic emphasis, though it is rooted in a metaphysics of consciousness rather than solely in political emancipation.

Within Indian higher education, the need for such reframing is particularly acute. The expansion of technical institutes, professional programs, and outcome-based accreditation has undeniably enhanced access and innovation. Yet it has also intensified specialization at the expense of integrative reflection. Sri Aurobindo's call for education that prepares individuals “to live for others and for the country and humanity” (Aurobindo, *On Education* 13) situates academic pursuit within ethical and civilizational responsibility. His insistence that “man is a transitional being” evolving toward higher consciousness (Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* 5) transforms the university from a credentialing apparatus into a laboratory of human evolution.

Reframing educational purpose through consciousness and character thus entails structural as well as philosophical reform. Foundational interdisciplinary courses, contemplative practices integrated into curricula, and ethical reflection embedded within scientific and professional training would embody this vision. The aim is neither sectarian spirituality nor rejection of modern knowledge but a synthesis in which disciplinary rigor coexists with inner growth. As Sri Aurobindo writes, “Education to be complete must have five principal aspects relating to the five principal activities of the human being” (Aurobindo, *On Education* 9). Indian higher education, poised between civilizational heritage and global modernity, stands uniquely positioned to actualize this integral paradigm.

In this reframed perspective, consciousness becomes the ground of inquiry, character its formative outcome, and curriculum the mediating structure through which both unfold. The recovery of educational purpose lies not in abandoning specialization but in situating it within a larger teleology of human development. Sri Aurobindo's

integrative philosophy, read comparatively alongside global educational thought, offers a coherent framework capable of reconciling excellence with ethics, knowledge with wisdom, and national aspiration with universal evolution.

Toward a Transformative Educational Paradigm:

The movement from philosophical critique to institutional application requires reconceiving education as a transformative praxis rather than a neutral mechanism of skill transmission. Sri Aurobindo's educational philosophy, grounded in an ontology of evolving consciousness, offers not merely a cultural supplement but a structurally necessary framework for reimagining policy, curriculum, and the purpose of higher education on a global scale. In *The Human Cycle*, Sri Aurobindo asserts that social institutions must evolve in consonance with the inner development of humanity, warning that systems which “outgrow the soul that created them” inevitably lapse into mechanical rigidity (Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle* 108). Education, as the primary formative institution, must therefore anticipate humanity's future rather than merely reproduce present competencies.

At the curricular level, this vision demands integrative rather than additive reform. Sri Aurobindo cautions in *On Education* that education should not be “a load of information” but a process that “draws out what is best and makes it perfect for use” (Aurobindo, *On Education* 2). This principle challenges outcome-based models that equate learning with quantifiable performance. Aurobindonian policy would instead foreground foundational interdisciplinary courses in consciousness studies, ethics, and integrative thinking, drawing upon selected passages from *The Life Divine* and *The Synthesis of Yoga* to introduce students to the philosophical unity underlying disciplinary plurality. Such courses would not function as doctrinal instruction but as critical frameworks enabling students to situate specialized knowledge within a larger human context.

Globally, parallel educational reform movements underscore the urgency of such integration. Edgar Morin, in *Seven Complex Lessons in Education for the Future*, argues that education must teach “the pertinence of knowledge,” emphasizing the need to contextualize and synthesize information across domains (Morin 2–3). Morin's call for complexity resonates with Sri Aurobindo's insistence that knowledge fragmented from consciousness becomes reductive. Similarly, UNESCO's report *Learning: The Treasure Within* proposes four pillars of education—learning to know, to do, to live together, and to be (Delors 37). Sri Aurobindo's framework anticipates this model, particularly in its emphasis on “learning to be,” which he

situates at the core of education's purpose (Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* 1063).

Policy implications also extend to teacher education and institutional culture. Sri Aurobindo insists that the educator must embody the values they seek to awaken, writing that "the example of the teacher is far more powerful than his words" (Aurobindo, *On Education* 21). This principle aligns with Parker J. Palmer's assertion in *The Courage to Teach* that "we teach who we are" (Palmer 2). Teacher training programs informed by this insight would prioritize reflective practice, ethical integrity, and inner development alongside pedagogical skill. Such reorientation challenges technocratic models of faculty evaluation that privilege output over formative influence.

From a policy perspective, integrating Sri Aurobindo's philosophy requires institutional courage. It calls for curricular spaces resistant to immediate market utility yet essential for long-term civilizational sustainability. Martha Nussbaum warns that education systems driven exclusively by economic growth risk undermining democratic and humane capacities (Nussbaum 18). Sri Aurobindo's insistence that education must prepare individuals "to live for humanity" rather than for self-interest alone (Aurobindo, *On Education* 13) reframes higher education as ethical stewardship. This orientation is particularly relevant in an age of ecological crisis, technological acceleration, and social polarization.

The global relevance of this paradigm lies in its universality without homogenization. Sri Aurobindo does not propose a uniform curriculum but an integral principle adaptable to cultural and disciplinary contexts. In *The Life Divine*, he emphasizes that evolution proceeds through diversity toward unity, not through enforced sameness (Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* 713). Institutions worldwide—whether in the Global South grappling with postcolonial legacies or in the Global North confronting technological excess—can adapt this principle to foster integrative learning ecosystems. Foundational courses in consciousness and ethics, interdisciplinary seminars linking science and humanities, and contemplative practices embedded within academic life exemplify such adaptation.

Ultimately, the policy significance of Sri Aurobindo's educational philosophy lies in its redefinition of success. Rankings, employability statistics, and research metrics, while not irrelevant, cannot serve as the sole indicators of educational achievement. If, as Sri Aurobindo maintains, "Man is a transitional being" whose destiny lies in the evolution of consciousness (Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* 5), then education must be judged by its capacity to facilitate that transition. Integrating his core writings into curricula—selectively, critically, and dialogically—constitutes not

optional enrichment but a structural imperative for building sustainable, humane, and globally responsive education systems. The transformative paradigm he envisions thus positions education as the conscious architect of humanity's future rather than a passive instrument of its present.

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A Delineation of Subjugated and Peripheral Culture in India: A Comparative Study of Selected Novels by Indira Goswami and Shobhan Bantwal.

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Abstract— This paper will provide a critical examination of how India which is although rich in culture, values, customs and tradition can also be peripheral and subjugated which frequently gives birth to difference of violence resulting in the exploitation of the female subject and erasing their individual self. By analyzing selected novels, *The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker* and *The Dowry Bride*, this paper delves into the mechanism constantly used to exploit the 'marginalized' sections within the realm of gender politics.



Keywords— Bodily Desires, Dowry, Exploitation, Gender Disparity, Marriage, Tradition, Widowhood.



I. INTRODUCTION

Indira Goswami who owns the pen name Mamoni Raisom Goswami was a writer, activist, poet from Assam. Her writings bring to light many social injustices prevalent in the society. In her novel *The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker* (Dontal Hatir Une Khowa Howdah) she brings to light how the lives of widows in a Sattrā are succumbed under the heavy weight of tradition.

The second author taken up for study is Shobhan Bantwal, an Indian-born American novelist. Bantwal in her novel *The Dowry Bride* critically explores the theme of traditional arranged marriage and its intersection with the malpractices such as dowry system which stays deeply entrenched in the Indian Culture.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH GAP

This part of the paper intends to explore the research gap and try to explore the research gap and try to initiate the scope for attending the work.

In the Journal, "Representations of violence against women: a study of selected Indian fiction" (Sikha, 2012) states that the present research project is an attempt to map

a concrete feminist theory that articulate these instances of violence that have been previously ignored or underplayed.

In the Journal, "Feminist Nuances in the select novels of Shobhan Bantwal P.Sivakami and Meghna Pant" (K.Padmalata manepalli, 2023) states that Bantwal endeavors to explore the delicate issue of Dowry and subsequent problems reflected in a woman's life as a bride when she steps into the institution of marriage.

From the above we get to know how different scholars have considered the two selected novels *The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker* and *The Dowry Bride* through the general lenses of violence or feminism. Therefore this fixed limitation of the two novels actually camouflages harsher realities and societal truth Indian Culture and tradition hold. Hence this research seeks to fill the gap and explore more about the peripheral and subjugated nature about the Indian cultural traditions that eternalize domestic violence and gender biases.

OBJECTIVES:

- To critically analyze the two selected novels as far as Indian traditional norms and culture is concerned
- To investigate into the exploitation and subjugation of women in the selected novels.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of the proposed work of the selected novels of Indira Goswami and Shobhan Bantwal has been identified for primary research attention which will be critically analyzed. The study will make use of descriptive qualitative research approach out of books, journals, along with making use of text critical study and research framework.

IV. DISCUSSION

i. Analyzing the selected novels:

The novels entitled *The Moth Eaten Howdah Of The Tusker* by Indira Goswami and *The Dowry Bride* by Shobhan Bantwal taken up for study inquire into how the stiff social norms and religious practices in the name of customs are eroding the human dignity. The “Peripheral” is not to be misunderstood as an umbrella term for Indian Culture rather it is the reflection of the author towards the repressive tyrannical practices, prevailing in the novels.

The novel *The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker* explores the restrictive environment surrounding the “Brahmin Widows”, the “Bodily Desires”, and the “Sattras”. The widows were succumbing to live a life of a molded puppet. Being a woman in a constructive patriarchal world has immense challenges in itself furthermore “widowhood” imposes tons of unbearable loads upon these women. The three widows introduced in the novel- Saru Gossainee, Giribala, Durga though have their own individual plights but were woven from the same thread. Durga, the one adheres to the traditional practices of widowhood, where she accepts what was imposed on her as her destiny. She was thrown out of her marital house by her in-laws just after the death of her husband. This clearly shows Women as tenants in both her maternal and marital house belonging fully to neither. Moreover the seizing of all her wealth just after her attainment of widowhood highlights the economic imbalances prevailing in the gendered society. It is also regarded that when a man dies, it is his wife fault to be not fortunate enough to hold the longevity of his soul and hence she is treated as a prisoner which showcases the cruel cultural bias.

Giribala, another woman has the same fate. She was widowed at a very tender age which is the result of the rush to get girls married as soon as possible and in many cases even before they attained puberty to man quite older to them. The Sattras in the guise of a “protector” in reality are exploiting human dignity. In one such incident, when she returned back to her parent’s home, things were not different. She was made to erase herself as a person with a mind, body and soul. When she wanted to go near the

pond, Durga intervened and told her, “Now things have changed. You are a widow” (Goswami, 408). The rules of the “Pratha” that a widow has to perform or go through are inhuman where they were stripped off their individuality. Every facets of their existence from clothing to dietary demands adjustments and more ridiculous is the fact that they are supposed to make themselves invisible within the community. Giribala was not amongst those who would succumb to all these conservatism and hence was a voice of protest. Once when she runs to Mark’s hut to escape from being taken away by her in-laws and lead a miserable life shows her way of protest. Based on mere suspicion rather than any proof, the villagers found it impure or sinful for a widow being caught within the premises of another man; consequently seek to purify her through rituals. Patriarchal authority doesn’t require any explanation and eventually everything have to be true what their eyes see and what they construct. Giribala resisted to perform anything to proof herself and her validation. Instead she sacrificed and offered herself to the fire. This was her way of tragic protest amidst the oppressive power dynamics.

Saru Gossainee, another widow’s ‘Bodily Desires’ and ‘Love’ for Mahidar remain repressed under the narrow minded ‘Sattras’. Mahidar acting as the male predator fixes his eyes on his prey Saru Gossainee by making her believe that her affection is being reciprocated. He deceives her both financially and emotionally. The rigid social boundaries of the ‘Sattras’ and being ‘a woman and a widow’ silenced Saru Gossainee preventing her to seek justice against Mahidar’s exploitation and turning herself to a ‘meek observer’. Furthermore ‘menstruation’ hints at the deeply ingrained nature of the ‘taboo’ within societal structures. In the ‘Sattras’ menstruating women are regarded as impure and were distanced from participating in religious or social activities and are regarded to make themselves invisible as it states, “In the sattras, menstruation is considered to be the “greatest sin” and no one touches a woman during her “monthly flow” because of the risk of contracting the impurity (Goswami, 128). This is a way to hover power and control over women’s body by male populace resulting in stigma and fundamental imbalance in equality sidelining women in a subservient position.

The novel *The Dowry Bride* of Shobhan Bantwal highlights the burning issue of ‘Dowry’ within a traditional Indian setting which indeed is saturated with uncountable acts of violence including murder, exploitation, suppression. Bantwal portrays a landscape of gender disparity and the oppressive outlook towards wives often looked as unpaid laborers. Megha, the protagonist is portrayed as vulnerable from the moment she entered into

this world as a girl which exposes the crude nature of gender inequality. As Shobhan Bantwal points out in the text:

“Her father was in his forties, her mother in her thirties. When they were desperately hoping it would at least turned to be boy after they had produced two girls, aged thirteen and eleven, along she came- another infant girl- will the wants, needs and tribulations of a female.” (Bantwal, 11)

Megha was beautiful and educated born into a middle class family; however the pressure of early marriage was the only primary concern of her family. In general in India it is seen how the groom's family often turns the bride's family into scapegoats. When Megha's parents were unable to produce the dowry Suresh's mother Amma decided to get rid of her by burning her alive as points out to Suresh, “Don't you understand that she is worthless? Amma rolled her eyes seemingly, frustrated with her son's lack comprehension. Her father is never going to come up with the dowry. His actions are what I call illegal.” (Bantwal, 18)

They own a mindset where ‘killing’ somebody is viewed as ‘legal’ whereas incompetent to cater to their greed (dowry) is ‘illegal’. Within the institution of marriage, the perceived urgency of bearing children follows closely; unfortunately, a failure to do so can lead to domestic abuse. This is evident in Megha's situation too, as being unable to provide them with the beautiful grandchildren, as they expected gives birth to further conflict. From the very hour that Megha joins the Ramnath family, she becomes a prey to their ill treatment. Bantwal showcases how women exploit women specifically how Amma loses her basic humanity in the quest for wealth, disguised in the name of ‘custom’ and ‘tradition’ being used as a tool of control and power. Growing up under the blanket of tradition and social barriers women somehow get themselves entangled within its web. When Megha runs into Kunal's (Suresh's cousin) house under emotional circumstances she got captivated. She falls into the web of love for Kunal which blossomed equally from both sides. However after consuming their relationship but being traditionally bound, she finds herself as a failure in keeping herself chaste. She undertakes an unexpected move ‘an attempt to suicide’. The irony lies in the fact that she ran away from Amma and Suresh to save her life yet attempts to end it herself. It is a kind of trauma and entrapment that denies her agency in all possible ways. The threads of “should and shouldn't” are being woven to the women so tightly that she becomes a part of the fabric either consciously or subconsciously.

ii. The exploitation of women in selected novels:

Novels serve as the medium of general truths. It acts as a mirror which reflects societal flaws, harsh realities along with its values and inherent complexities. The Exploitation of women is neither a new phenomenon nor a recent development which has taken birth recently, rather it is a systematic chained issue that is running in a continuous process.

Both Indira Goswami and Shobhan Bantwal come up with addressing those burning exploitation in their selected novels of them i.e. *The Dowry Bride* and *The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*. We witnessed how the female members of the clan were exploited no matter whether it is Giribala, Durga, Saru Gossainee or Megha, the pervasive force had stripped them of their fundamental agency. They were identified not by who they are but to whom they were related to; as someone's widow, someone's daughter or someone's wife. The controlling nature of patriarchal society has resulted in leaving no room for woman's agency and their escape becomes what Langston Hughes famously termed a ‘deferred dream’ (line 1).

V. CONCLUSION

The study critically examines the selected novels of Indira Goswami and Shobhan Bantwal. It explores how the culture and tradition of India though diverse and rich in cultural heritage and traditional framework but yet occupied with conflicting values. The significant practices such as ‘Dowry’, ‘customs and traditions’, ‘marriage’, ‘widowhood’, ‘gender gap’ acts enforcing factors that intertwines tradition and culture in India, consequently it built a complex web of entrapment which proliferate more to the plight of the ‘suppressed’ and ‘marginalized’. From these observations we can draw clear elements of subjugation and peripheralism inherent in certain aspects as far as Indian culture and tradition is concerned.

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From Policy to Practice: Assessing the Impact of the RPwD Act (2016) on the Occupational Wellbeing of Central Secretariat Service Officers

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Abstract— *The enactment of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016, signaled a watershed moment in India's legislative approach to disability, transitioning from a charity-based medical model to a human-rights-based framework. This paper critically examines the implementation and impact of this legislative mandate within the Central Secretariat Service (CSS)—the administrative and structural backbone of the Government of India. Through a comprehensive policy analysis and review of secondary data, this study assesses how statutory provisions such as "Reasonable Accommodation," non-discrimination, and reservation in promotions influence the occupational wellbeing of CSS officers. Occupational wellbeing is evaluated through a multidimensional lens: physical accessibility, professional growth, and psychological safety. Findings indicate that while significant physical and digital milestones have been achieved via the Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan and the transition to the e-Office ecosystem, systemic bottlenecks and institutional ableism persist⁷. The paper concludes with targeted policy recommendations for the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) to bridge the gap between policy intent and workplace reality, fostering a genuinely inclusive bureaucratic culture.*



Keywords— *Central Secretariat Service, RPwD Act 2016, Occupational Wellbeing, Reasonable Accommodation, Inclusive Bureaucracy, Institutional Ableism.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Central Secretariat Service (CSS) functions as the permanent bureaucratic machinery of the Union Government of India. Officers within this cadre are responsible for policy formulation, continuity of administration, and the execution of legislative mandates across various Ministries housed in the North and South Blocks of New Delhi. Given the high-pressure, intellectually demanding, and hierarchical nature of the CSS, the working conditions of its officers directly impact the efficacy of national governance¹⁸.

Historically, the inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) in the elite echelons of the civil services was restricted by narrow definitions of disability and limited

entry-level quotas under the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995^{9,13}. However, the RPwD Act, 2016, fundamentally altered this landscape. By recognizing 21 categories of disabilities and establishing the statutory right to "Reasonable Accommodation," the Act sought to create an equitable playing field³.

Despite these progressive legal frameworks, the lived experiences of CSS officers with disabilities often reveal a disconnect between the statute and its implementation. This paper aims to investigate that disconnect. It seeks to answer a critical question: *How has the RPwD Act (2016) practically influenced the day-to-day occupational wellbeing, career trajectory, and workplace integration of disabled employees within the Central Secretariat?*

II. CONCEPTUALIZING OCCUPATIONAL WELL-BEING IN THE BUREAUCRACY

Occupational wellbeing goes beyond the mere absence of workplace hazards or the provision of basic salary benefits. The World Health Organization defines a healthy workplace as one where workers and managers collaborate to protect and promote the health, safety, and wellbeing of all workers⁵.

For a CSS officer with a disability, occupational wellbeing is conceptualized through a tripartite model:

Physical and Environmental Wellbeing: This relates to barrier-free access to government buildings, ergonomic workstations, and accessible commute options.

Professional Wellbeing: This encompasses equitable opportunities for career advancement, unbiased performance appraisals, and postings to "sensitive" or high-impact desks without prejudice.

Psychological and Social Wellbeing: This involves a sense of belonging, the development of Psychological Capital (PsyCap)—including hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism¹²—the absence of micro-aggressions, and the existence of a supportive peer network.

When analyzing the impact of the RPwD Act, all three dimensions must be evaluated to understand the holistic employee experience¹⁹.

III. THE LEGAL AND POLICY EVOLUTION: SETTING THE CONTEXT

3.1. The Paradigm Shift of the RPwD Act, 2016

The 2016 Act brought the Indian legal framework into alignment with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)²⁰. For central government employees, several sections are of paramount importance³:

- **Section 20 (Non-discrimination in employment):** Prohibits government establishments from discriminating against any person relating to any matter concerning employment. It explicitly states that no promotion shall be denied to a person merely on the ground of disability.
- **Section 20(2) (Reasonable Accommodation):** This is perhaps the most transformative clause. It obligates the government to make appropriate modifications and adjustments to ensure PwDs can effectively discharge their duties¹⁷.

- **Section 34:** Mandates a minimum of 4% reservation in government jobs for individuals with benchmark disabilities.

3.2. DoPT Guidelines and Judicial Interventions

The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) serves as the human resources arm of the government. Translating the RPwD Act into actionable rules for the CSS has required persistent judicial prodding. The landmark Supreme Court judgment in *Siddharaju vs State of Karnataka*⁴ was instrumental in forcing the government to recognize that the mandate of reservation does not stop at the entry-level.

Consequently, the DoPT issued crucial Office Memorandums extending reservations in promotions to PwD candidates up to the lowest rung of Group 'A' posts, which translates to the Under Secretary level within the CSS². This policy intervention directly impacts the "Professional Wellbeing" of disabled officers, effectively shattering the glass ceiling that previously confined many to subordinate roles for their entire careers.

IV. IMPLEMENTATION REALITIES: ASSESSING THE SECRETARIAT ECOSYSTEM

The transition from a theoretical right to a practical reality within the complex machinery of the Central Secretariat reveals a mixed record of successes and persistent challenges⁶.

4.1. The Physical Landscape: Accessibility in the Corridors of Power

The *Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan* (Accessible India Campaign) catalyzed the retrofitting of several central government buildings¹. Major structures like Shastri Bhawan, Krishi Bhawan, and Udyog Bhawan have seen the installation of ramps, tactile paving, and accessible washrooms¹⁵.

However, occupational wellbeing is often compromised by the uneven nature of this accessibility. High-security zones, heritage sections of the North and South Blocks, and inter-departmental transit routes frequently lack seamless accessibility. For an officer with a locomotor disability, navigating between different ministries for inter-departmental meetings remains a logistical hurdle that requires immense physical exertion, detracting from their primary administrative duties.

4.2. Digital Accessibility: The e-Office Paradigm

The CSS operates heavily on file movement. The transition from physical files to the National Informatics Centre's (NIC) e-Office platform has been a double-edged sword.

- **The Advantage:** For officers with mobility impairments, e-Office has drastically reduced the

need to physically transport voluminous files, thereby enhancing their efficiency and comfort.

- **The Barrier:** For visually impaired officers relying on screen readers (like JAWS or NVDA), the e-Office ecosystem has historically presented severe compatibility issues¹¹. Non-OCRed PDF attachments, complex digital signature interfaces, and non-standardized web portals violate global accessibility standards. When an officer cannot independently read a file noting due to software incompatibility, it directly undermines their professional autonomy.

V. THE EXECUTION OF REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION

In practice, reasonable accommodation within the CSS is heavily dependent on the discretion of immediate superiors and the efficiency of the Ministry's administration division¹⁰. While the provision of customized furniture or software is mandated, the procurement process is often delayed by rigid General Financial Rules (GFR). Officers report waiting months for basic assistive devices, during which their productivity and wellbeing suffer¹⁴.

Furthermore, DoPT guidelines recommend exempting PwD officers from routine rotational transfers that might uproot their established medical and social support systems. While generally adhered to, the application of this rule is sometimes viewed by peers not as an "accommodation," but as an "unfair privilege," leading to social friction.

5.1. The "Invisible" Barriers: Attitudinal and Psychological Challenges

The most significant threats to the occupational wellbeing of CSS officers with disabilities are not architectural, but attitudinal¹⁶. The bureaucratic culture, deeply rooted in traditional notions of "efficiency" and "merit," often harbors implicit biases.

5.2. Institutional Ableism and the "Soft Desk" Bias

There is a pervasive, unspoken tendency within the administration to assign PwD officers to relatively benign, low-pressure divisions (often referred to as "soft desks" or "loophole postings" like Parliamentary Assurances, Hindi Rajbhasha, or Record Rooms)⁷. While sometimes done out of a misguided sense of paternalism or protection, this practice severely curtails the officer's professional exposure. Denying disabled officers the opportunity to handle "sensitive" or high-intensity desks limits their experience, ultimately harming their prospects for merit-based promotions¹⁹.

5.3. The Stigma of Grievance Redressal

Although the RPwD Act mandates the appointment of a Grievance Redressal Officer (GRO) in every establishment³, utilizing this mechanism carries a psychological cost. CSS officers often express reluctance to file formal grievances regarding lack of accommodation, fearing they will be labeled as "difficult" or "demanding" by the administrative hierarchy. This forces many to internalize their struggles, leading to occupational burnout and decreased mental wellbeing.

5.4. Policy Recommendations and the Way Forward

To bridge the gap between the progressive vision of the RPwD Act and the daily realities of the Central Secretariat Service, a multi-pronged reform strategy is required:

- **Mandatory Digital Accessibility Audits:** The NIC must enforce strict WCAG 2.1 compliance across all internal government portals, including SPARROW and the e-Office suite¹¹.
- **Centralized Corpus for Assistive Technologies:** To bypass the delays of standard GFR procurement, a centralized, fast-tracked budgetary corpus should be established specifically for reasonable accommodation requests¹⁷.
- **De-biasing Postings and Promotions:** Human Resource divisions within Ministries must actively audit their internal posting distributions to ensure PwD officers are mentored to take up core policy desks⁷.
- **Sensitization and Inclusive Leadership Training:** The Institute of Secretariat Training and Management (ISTM) must move beyond theoretical lectures and include experiential learning modules on unconscious bias and institutional ableism.
- **Empowering the Liaison Officer:** The role of the Disability Liaison Officer must be elevated to an officer of at least the Joint Secretary rank, ensuring they have the administrative authority to implement immediate changes¹⁴.

VI. CONCLUSION

The RPwD Act, 2016, provided the necessary legal scaffolding to build an inclusive federal bureaucracy⁸. Within the Central Secretariat Service, the Act has undoubtedly catalyzed positive change, particularly in securing promotional avenues and initiating infrastructural retrofitting. However, the true measure of the Act's success lies in the occupational wellbeing of the employees it protects.

Currently, the wellbeing of disabled CSS officers is sustained more by individual resilience than by systemic facilitation. Moving from policy to practice requires the Government of India to dismantle the invisible attitudinal barriers and rigid bureaucratic processes that stifle potential. By embracing proactive accessibility, equitable career management, and empathetic administration, the Central Secretariat can transform itself into a model of inclusive governance.

VII. SUGGESTIONS

Building upon the study's findings, the following actionable steps are recommended to enhance inclusive governance within the Central Secretariat Service:

[A]- Establish Peer Support Networks: The DoPT should facilitate cross-ministry support groups to help disabled officers share lived experiences, navigate bureaucratic challenges, and build psychological resilience.

[B]- Implement Anonymous Feedback: Ministries must integrate secure, anonymous feedback portals within the e-Office system. This allows officers to report biases or accommodation delays without fearing negative impacts on their performance appraisals.

[C]- Benchmark Globally: The Indian federal bureaucracy should actively compare its disability inclusion metrics against the best practices of other Global South democracies to adopt more empathetic human resource frameworks.

[D]- Conduct Longitudinal Research: Future academic studies should track cohorts of disabled CSS officers over a five-to-ten-year period to assess the long-term effectiveness of the RPwD Act (2016) on their occupational wellbeing.

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Literature as Reflection: Temptation and Moral Consciousness in *Murder in the Cathedral* and *Doctor Faustus*

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Abstract— This paper presents literature as a reflection of human experiences through a comparative study of *Murder in the Cathedral* by T. S. Eliot and *Doctor Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe, focusing on their exploration of temptation, moral conflict, and human decision-making. While Eliot's play portrays temptation as an internal, spiritual struggle that requires self-awareness and purity of intention, Marlowe's tragedy presents it as a combination of ambition and external influence leading to moral downfall. Through close textual analysis and comparative interpretation, the study highlights the contrasting responses of Thomas Becket and Faustus, emphasizing the role of individual choice and responsibility. In addition, the paper incorporates a reflective dimension, demonstrating how these texts contribute to a deeper understanding of personal ethical and moral challenges. It argues that both works extend beyond their literary significance to function as guides for recognizing and resisting temptation in everyday life.



Keywords— Temptation, Moral Conflict, Ethical Decision-Making, Self-Awareness, Ambition, Spiritual Integrity, Tragedy, Human Choice, Literature and Ethics

"The last temptation is the greatest treason: to do the right deed for the wrong reason."

-T. S. Eliot

Literature as a reflection

Literature is often viewed as a form of entertainment, a means of escaping reality through stories, characters, and imaginative worlds. While this perspective is not entirely incorrect, it is incomplete. Literature does more than entertain; it reflects human experiences, explores complex emotions, and presents moral dilemmas that closely resemble real-life situations. Through these qualities, literature becomes a powerful tool that can influence decision-making and shape an individual's understanding of life. Works such as *Murder in the Cathedral* by T. S. Eliot and *Doctor Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe clearly demonstrate that literature can function as a guide, helping

individuals navigate ethical challenges and personal choices.

One of the most important ways in which literature contributes to decision-making is by presenting situations that require moral judgment. Characters in literary works often face difficult choices, and their actions lead to consequences that reveal the complexity of human behaviour. When readers engage with these narratives, they are not passive observers. Instead, they are encouraged to think critically about what they would do in similar situations. This process develops a sense of moral awareness. For instance, in *Murder in the Cathedral*, the character of Thomas Becket is confronted with various

temptations that test his integrity. His struggle is not just a historical or religious event but a reflection of the internal conflicts that individuals experience in their own lives. By observing how he evaluates and ultimately rejects these temptations, readers gain insight into the importance of self-awareness and ethical clarity.

Similarly, *Doctor Faustus* presents a contrasting perspective. Faustus is a scholar who chooses to pursue power and knowledge without considering the moral consequences of his actions. His decisions lead to his downfall, demonstrating the dangers of ambition when it is not guided by responsibility. Through Faustus's story, readers are reminded that decisions made without careful thought can have lasting and irreversible consequences. This awareness can influence how individuals approach their own choices, encouraging them to consider not only immediate benefits but also long-term effects.

Another way in which literature serves as a useful tool is by helping individuals understand themselves better. Many literary works explore the inner thoughts and emotions of characters, revealing their fears, desires, and motivations. This introspective quality allows readers to recognize similar patterns in their own thinking. For example, the concept of doing the right thing for the wrong reason, as highlighted in *Murder in the Cathedral*, is particularly relevant in everyday life. People often justify their actions by focusing on the outcome rather than the intention behind it. Literature encourages readers to question such justifications and to examine their true motives. This process of self-reflection can lead to more thoughtful and responsible decision-making.

In addition to fostering self-awareness, literature also develops empathy. By engaging with diverse characters and perspectives, readers learn to understand experiences that are different from their own. This ability to empathise is essential for making fair and ethical decisions, especially in situations that involve other people. When individuals consider the feelings and viewpoints of others, they are more likely to act with compassion and understanding. Literature, therefore, not only shapes personal decisions but also contributes to the development of social responsibility.

Moreover, literature provides a safe space for exploring consequences. In real life, decisions often come with risks and uncertainties, and the outcomes cannot always be predicted. However, in literature, readers can observe the consequences of actions without experiencing them directly. This allows them to learn from the successes and failures of characters. For instance, the tragic end of Faustus serves as a warning about the dangers of ignoring moral boundaries, while the steadfastness of Becket demonstrates the value of integrity and conviction. These lessons remain

with readers and can influence their behaviour in real-life situations.

It is also important to note that literature does not provide direct instructions or simple solutions. Instead, it presents complex situations that require interpretation and critical thinking. This aspect makes literature particularly valuable, as it encourages individuals to develop their own judgments rather than relying on predetermined answers. By engaging with literary texts, readers learn to analyse situations, weigh different perspectives, and arrive at conclusions based on careful consideration. These skills are essential for making informed decisions in everyday life.

Furthermore, literature connects individual experiences to broader human concerns. Themes such as ambition, temptation, responsibility, and morality are not limited to specific cultures or time periods. They are universal aspects of human existence. By exploring these themes, literature helps individuals understand that their struggles are part of a larger human experience. This realization can provide comfort and guidance, making it easier to navigate challenges and uncertainties.

It is clearly understood that literature is far more than a source of entertainment. It is a meaningful and practical tool that contributes to personal growth and ethical decision-making. Through the exploration of moral dilemmas, the development of self-awareness, the cultivation of empathy, and the examination of consequences, literature equips individuals with the skills needed to make thoughtful and responsible choices. Works like *Murder in the Cathedral* and *Doctor Faustus* demonstrate how powerful this influence can be. By engaging with literature, readers do not simply escape reality; they gain a deeper understanding of it, enabling them to approach life's decisions with greater clarity, insight, and integrity. Among all the human experiences, dealing with temptation eventually leading to moral and ethical decision making is explored below using the two plays.

Treatment of Temptation

Temptation is a universal human experience, yet it often operates in quiet and complex ways that are not immediately visible. Literature provides a powerful means of understanding this experience by presenting it in structured and meaningful forms. *Murder in the Cathedral* by T. S. Eliot and *Doctor Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe are two significant works that explore the nature of temptation and moral struggle. Although these plays belong to different historical periods, they present deeply similar concerns about human nature in depth, the decision-making at difficult times, ethical responsibility, and the consequences of choice.

The historical context of each play plays a crucial role in shaping its treatment of temptation. *Doctor Faustus* was written during the Renaissance, a period that emphasized human potential, intellectual curiosity, and ambition. Faustus represents this spirit through his desire to acquire limitless knowledge and power. However, this desire ultimately leads to his downfall, suggesting that ambition without moral restraint can be destructive. As Bevington notes, Faustus reflects the aspirations and anxieties of Renaissance humanism (Bevington 12).

In contrast, *Murder in the Cathedral* emerges from a twentieth-century context marked by spiritual uncertainty. Eliot responds to this uncertainty by emphasising faith, discipline, and moral clarity. The play dramatizes the final days of Thomas Becket, focusing on his confrontation with various temptations before his martyrdom. Rather than celebrating ambition, Eliot highlights the importance of self-awareness and the purification of intention. Gardner observes that Eliot's work reflects a deep concern with spiritual integrity and ethical responsibility (Gardner 45). One of the most striking aspects of Eliot's play is the structured presentation of temptation through four tempters. Each tempter represents a different form of desire: physical comfort, political power, revenge, and spiritual pride. The progression of these temptations illustrates how moral challenges become increasingly subtle. The fourth temptation is particularly significant because it appears virtuous. The desire to become a martyr seems noble, but it becomes problematic when motivated by pride. Eliot captures this idea when he writes that "the last temptation is the greatest treason: to do the right deed for the wrong reason" (Eliot 44).

This insight reveals that temptation is not always clearly negative. In everyday life, individuals often face situations where their actions appear morally correct but are influenced by questionable motives. For example, a person might help others not out of genuine concern but in order to gain recognition or approval. Eliot's play encourages readers to examine their intentions carefully and to recognize the complexity of moral decision-making.

In *Doctor Faustus*, temptation is more direct but equally complex. Faustus is offered knowledge and power in exchange for his soul, and he consciously accepts this bargain. However, his decision is not entirely straightforward. Throughout the play, he experiences moments of doubt and hesitation. The presence of the Good Angel and the Evil Angel represent his internal conflict, illustrating the tension between conscience and desire. Faustus's famous declaration that "a sound magician is a mighty god" reflects his ambition and foreshadows his tragic fate (Marlowe 8).

Both plays emphasize the psychological dimension of temptation. In Eliot's work, the tempters can be interpreted as manifestations of Becket's inner thoughts. They represent his fears, ambitions, and doubts, making the play deeply introspective. Similarly, in Marlowe's play, the Good and Evil Angels externalize Faustus's internal struggle. These representations highlight the idea that temptation is not merely an external force but a complex interaction between external influences and internal desires.

A key theme in both works is the importance of personal choice. Despite the presence of external influences, both Becket and Faustus are ultimately responsible for their decisions. Becket achieves moral clarity by rejecting all forms of temptation, including the desire for spiritual glory. His martyrdom is portrayed as a victory of integrity rather than a defeat. In contrast, Faustus repeatedly fails to act on his moral awareness. Even when he recognizes the consequences of his actions, he delays repentance and continues on his destructive path.

The contrast between these two characters highlights the consequences of different responses to temptation. Becket's resistance leads to spiritual fulfilment, while Faustus's submission results in tragedy. This contrast underscores the importance of aligning one's actions with one's values and acting decisively in moments of moral conflict. Engaging with these plays has had a significant impact on my understanding of temptation. *Murder in the Cathedral* encouraged me to reflect on the importance of intention. It made me realise that even actions that appear morally correct can be influenced by hidden motives such as pride or the desire for recognition. This awareness has helped me approach decisions with greater honesty and self-examination.

At the same time, *Doctor Faustus* served as a cautionary example of how small ethical compromises can accumulate over time. Faustus's downfall is not the result of a single decision but a series of choices that gradually lead him away from his values. This insight has encouraged me to pay closer attention to everyday decisions and to consider their long-term consequences.

These plays demonstrate that literature is not merely a form of entertainment but a valuable tool for understanding human behaviour. By presenting complex characters and situations, literature allows readers to explore ethical questions in a reflective and meaningful way. The lessons derived from these texts can be applied to various aspects of life, including academic integrity, professional ethics, and personal relationships.

On the whole, *Murder in the Cathedral* and *Doctor Faustus* provide profound insights into the nature of temptation and moral decision-making. Through their contrasting

portrayals of resistance and submission, they highlight the importance of self-awareness, intention, and responsibility. While Eliot emphasizes spiritual discipline and ethical clarity, Marlowe illustrates the dangers of unchecked ambition and moral negligence. Together, these works offer a comprehensive understanding of temptation and its role in shaping human experience. Most importantly, they show that the struggle against temptation is not extraordinary but universal, and that literature can play a crucial role in helping individuals navigate this struggle with greater awareness and integrity.

Personal Reflection: Literature and My Experience with Temptation

While the analytical study of *Murder in the Cathedral* and *Doctor Faustus* helped me understand the structure and meaning of temptation, their real impact became visible only when I began to relate them to my own life. These works did not remain as distant literary texts for me; instead, they gradually became practical guides that shaped the way I observe and respond to everyday situations.

One of the most important things I learned from *Murder in the Cathedral* is that temptation does not come in a single, obvious form. It appears step by step, often in ways that seem reasonable or even harmless. The four tempters in the play made me realise that temptations can be divided and understood one by one. This idea changed my perspective completely. Earlier, I used to think of temptation as something sudden and difficult to control, but Eliot's presentation showed me that it can be recognised early if one is attentive.

Because of this understanding, I now try to observe situations more carefully. When I face a choice, I often pause and think about the intention behind my action. There have been moments when I have been drawn toward something that seemed beneficial at first but did not feel entirely right. In such situations, remembering Becket's struggle has helped me stop and reflect. I may not always avoid temptation immediately, but I have learned to recognize it sooner and prevent it from developing further. This ability to pause and reconsider is something I directly connect to my reading of the play.

Another important lesson from Eliot's work is the idea that even a good action can become wrong if it is done for the wrong reason. This concept influenced me deeply because it made me question my own motivations. For example, while working on academic tasks, I sometimes found that my efforts were driven more by the desire for appreciation than genuine interest. Recognising this helped me shift my focus toward sincerity rather than external validation. In this way, the play did not just teach me about temptation but also about honesty with myself.

In contrast, *Doctor Faustus* affected me in a different but equally powerful way. Unlike *Murder in the Cathedral*, where temptation is clearly presented, in *Doctor Faustus* it is not always openly identified. As readers, we can clearly see that Faustus is being tempted, but he himself fails to recognise it or chooses to ignore it. This distance between the reader's understanding and the character's awareness became a significant lesson for me.

Faustus's downfall is not sudden. He gradually moves further into his choices until he reaches a point where returning becomes extremely difficult. This made me realise how dangerous it is to ignore small warnings. In real life, we often justify our actions, telling ourselves that we are still in control. However, Faustus's story shows that repeated small decisions can lead to a situation where control is lost.

What impacted me the most was the idea that Faustus had opportunities to change but did not act on them. This taught me that recognising a mistake is not enough; it is necessary to take action immediately. Whenever I find myself delaying a decision that I know is right, I am reminded of Faustus and the consequences of postponement. This reflection has helped me become more decisive in situations that involve ethical and moral choices.

These two plays together created a balance in my understanding. *Murder in the Cathedral* taught me how to identify and resist temptation, while *Doctor Faustus* showed me what happens when temptation is ignored or misunderstood. One gave me awareness, and the other gave me caution. Because of this, I do not see temptation as something abstract anymore. It has become something real, something that I can observe, analyse, and respond to consciously.

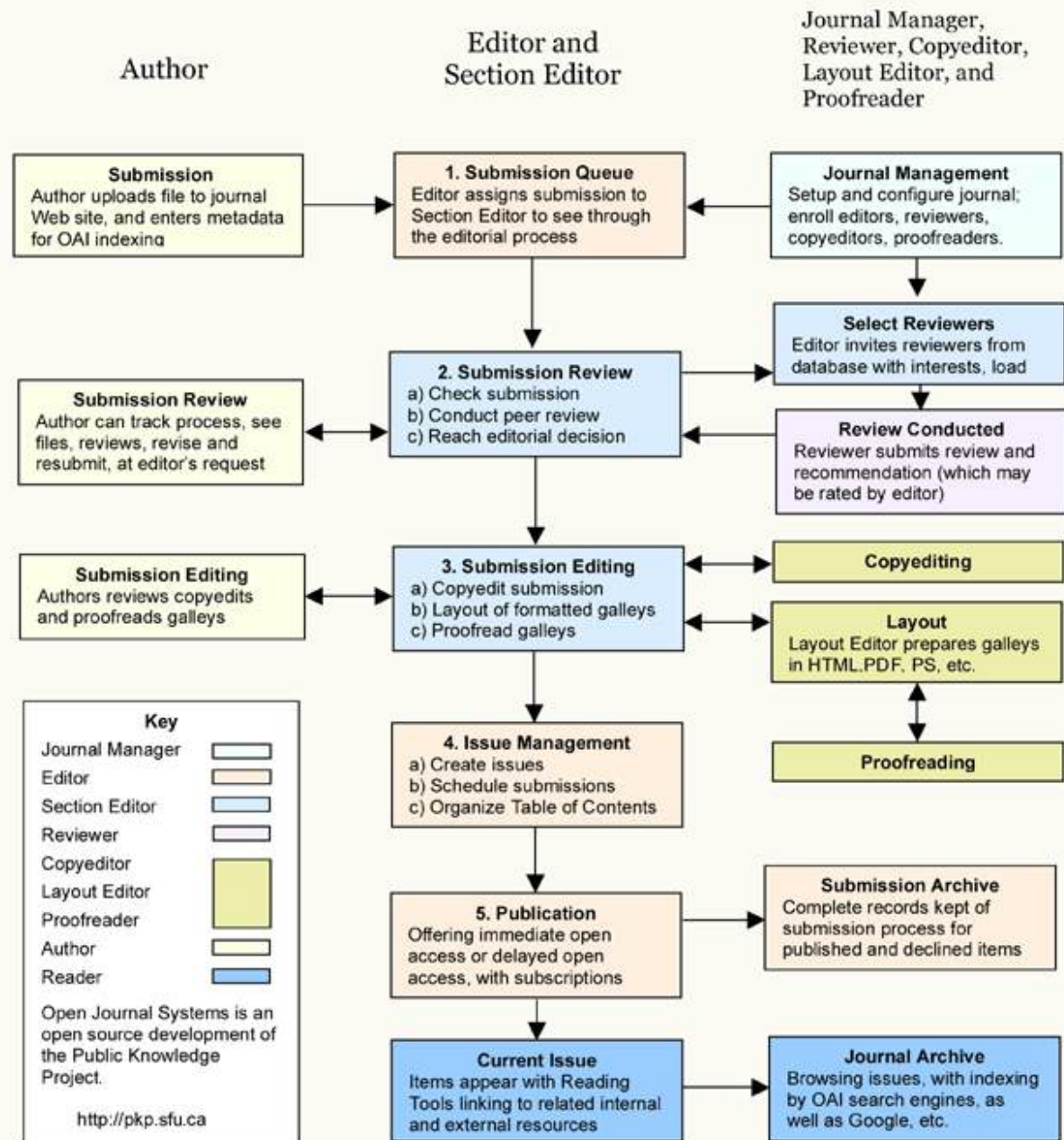
I also feel that this experience is not limited to me alone. Anyone who truly engages with these texts can apply their ideas to their own life. Literature, in this sense, becomes more than a subject of study. It becomes a way of thinking. It trains the mind to question, to reflect, and to act with awareness. When readers connect with characters and situations, they begin to see patterns that exist in their own lives.

In conclusion, *Murder in the Cathedral* and *Doctor Faustus* have had a lasting impact on my moral consciousness. They have changed the way I look at decisions, not by giving direct answers but by helping me understand the process behind those decisions. These works continue to guide me in small but important ways, reminding me to stay aware, to act responsibly, and to remain honest with my intentions. For me, this is the true power of literature, it does not simply tell a story, but it stays with us and influences how we live.

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